MYSTICA ALGOOAT

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MYSTICA ALGOOAT.

An Indian Legend and Story of Southern California.

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DEDICATION.

TO MY FATHER.

Preface to Legend.

America was discovered by the white man many centuries ago. He also discovered many secrets of the savage Indian—unsealed many treasures known and defended by him.

Gleaning the past four hundred years, we find the Saxon has accomplished many wonderful and almost impossible tasks. Our histories tell of the coming of Columbus, of terrible wars with the savage tribes, of the cruel destruction of the defenceless homes of the Saxons—in fact, many pages are needed to chronicle the difficulties and the sufferings that marked the beginnings of the history of America.

And so history, rich in narrative, is dear to the intelligent student of to-day. History records man's daily advancement and, dating back of his present day, reveals to him the developments of his forefathers, until he finds himself one of the characters joined to a nation to make its history.

Thousands of volumes record the course of past events, yet much remains unwritten. Able writers are spending years in recording recent events, while but few are taking a day for preserving in writing the remote past. If we could look back to the period of

the Moundbuilders, we likely should know also of the time when the immense mastodon inhabited the land. We are only guessing at the period of the mastodon, and feebly trying to point out his chosen feeding ground. We have been trying for years to solve the mysteries of the Moundbuilder, and now our knowledge rests solely upon nameless tombs of crumbling skeletons. These testimonies are weak and uncertain for the dead do not speak, nor do the relics enclosed with them.

From these skeleton remains we must grant that men at one time lived, and during their lives warred with the bow and arrow—hammered the flint with hardened copper. Long before our great grandfathers had knowledge of a western hemisphere, a history of a mountain peak was made by an Indian. And although he had little knowledge of how to preserve this history in writing, only the useless has been lost, the priceless pearls being handed down from father to son.

Many races have passed out of existence, but each has left the arrow or the tool of copper, so that his legendary history becomes a truth. Was this not true of the Moundbuilder, and will it not be proven true with the Cave-dweller? And does a true Californian doubt that another century and the tepees of Ramona's race shall be deserted as were those of their ancestors?

We Saxons have grown careless and uninterested in the Indian of the white hair and of more than one hundred years. We are daily passing him by as a beggar, as a nuisance; and more, we do not pause to listen to his legend, so soon to be numbered irrevoc-

ably among the vast unwritten volumes. Let us each stop in our rapid progress, and gather up all such precious records.

The name Bonifacio Cabse calls to mind a policeman of the Loboba Indians, and an Indian village on the Mission Reservation. Many times did I meet Bonifacio Cabse, and each time with a handshake and the greeting "me-oc'qua." Through Bonifacio Cabse I soon knew nearly every Indian on the Reservation, and then as they passed me on their broncos enroute to San Jacinito for supplies, or to the Agency for advice, it was "me-oc'qua."

One day I asked Bonifacio to tell me all he had told the Agent. At first he thought his religious spirit would curse him for revealing the tragedy which gave Tauquitz Legend its origin; but this all changed upon my offering him five silver dollars. The money was too tempting for Bonifacio Cabse, and for it he would disclose every secret bound up within his worshiped legend. Let us unravel this.

MYSTICA ALGOOAT.

An Indian Legend and Story of Southern California.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE MEETING.

While one may safely class the following chapters as "An Indian Story of Southern California," he may as well term it "A Story of a Land without a Boundary."

So far as the then inhabiting Indian could see, a boundless land outstretched itself. To measure its length and breadth was a task promising well to last a lifetime.

As to-day, Southern California then had its cragged mountains of granite, its expanse of level mesas, its verdant valleys with an occasional small river and lake. The seasons too were much as the seasons now. Wet winters, followed by long, dry and hot summers, and, in the course of a half century

a few years of many rainy months, and no less years of many dry and rainless ones.

Four almost rainless years had now spent themselves; the once green and stately trees resembled naked giants, while in valley bottoms, once rich with many varieties of flowers and grasses, a barren waste threatened.

At the head of a now desolate valley in this land is living a nameless tribe of Indians. They are of some intelligence, having chosen a fearless man for chieftain, a wise man for judge over disputes, and a saintly man as director over all the good spirits. They are looking unto a God for all their wants, and are otherwise in line with men of the highest civilization. Their trust is confided in the Acron or Oak Tree which, although in tree form, represents to them their Acron God.

The wealth of this nameless tribe is invested in one great flock of sheep, which through a decision in the Indian court, has passed into the control of the judge's first son, Silveric Sinon.

When less than ten years of age Silveric Sinon fully realized what it was to be the sole custodian of the tribe's riches. He knew, too, that it was possible to lose, through neglect, that which his father's decision had given him. Growing older, he became so fearful of this consequence as to herd the sheep in person. And so from the rising to the setting of the

sun he watched the great flock, and at night he slept among them. Often he would silently contemplate some parcel of land, covered as yet with scant dry feed, and his thoughts would turn toward fertile valleys far westward.

Early one summer morning Silveric started on a long trip westward. Absent from home but three suns, he returned weary and worn. Again, determined upon securing a quantity of dried mutton and grapes, he took with him his young brother Diego, and was gone.

"Will the Gods of the Acron Tree watch over us when so far from home?" boyishly asked young Diego; and Silveric firmly replied, "Yes, brother, the Gods of the Acron Tree are always with me, for I have riches attracting them." "And brother, are there Indians living in this land? Father says there are many, many bad Indians living in a cave high up in the mountains. Are they as large and strong as Pedro Palo?" "No brother, they are small in stature."

"My poor sheep," murmured Silveric. "Poor sheep," repeated Diego, picking a few dry stems of grass and putting them into his mouth.

Before the sun set Silveric and Diego were looking over a land which promised an abundance of feed. Overjoyed in this, Silveric began dancing, and as he danced he lashed his sides with his open palms

until the blood almost spurted forth. Diego stood watching his brother until the latter cried out, "We have found better land than our fathers!" Then he, too, joined in the dance.

"Ah!" Silveric whispered, presently ceasing his wild dancing and looking out toward the thicket: "coyotes, brother," he said, soberly.

"Why cease to dance, brother?" asked Diego, still dancing.

"Ah, I can no longer dance for joy, for the coyotes endanger my riches and my sheep."

"Can we not drive them into the mountains?" asked Diego.

"No, no, there is just one thing to be done. You hasten home and tell Pedro Palo to come. Have him bring many, many arrows, and you, Diego, bring father's swiftest hounds."

"And who is to bring the dried mutton and grapes?" asked Diego, seriously.

"They are both with us in this land," replied Silveric, "for see, yonder upon the mesa buds the cactus fruit. Then too, should we need, we shall kill a sheep."

"And then, too, Silveric," said Diego, happy in the thought, "Pedro is a true shot and he can easily hit a rabbit as it runs for the thicket, or a bird as it flies by."

Diego started with the sun on his long tramp up the

valley. No sooner had he gone than Silveric ascended a near-by foothill to look over the paradise he felt lay all about him. For some time he sat there watching the outstretched mesas. Soon he saw some moving object. "It's poor Diego," he said, sorrowfully, watching the slowly moving figure. "Diego is lost, having gone down the valley when he should have gone up." Silveric continued to follow the figure as it moved in and out among the low bushes. "Diego sees me," he whispered, crossing his hands upon his breast and uttering a sacred "Amen!" to the Acron God. He watched the figure slowly drawing nearer. Then, wishing to surprise Diego he ran to hide himself in a thicket of rose bushes. It seemed to Silveric that even the day had passed, still he waited. "What! what! are my eyes false?" he questioned himself, "for behold this who comes is not Diego. It is an Indian maiden, and she is lost. Ah, she discovers me," said Silveric, becoming alarmed. "She stoops to examine my footprints. What if she should be a member of the bad-spirited Indians? She will destroy my sheep." Silveric crouched lower.

"Ah! she speaks!" and Silveric listened. "Has my father been here? Maybe it is my lover's footprints," she said.

"She must be lost," Silveric decided. Then, "She is beautiful," he thought, as he studied her from his concealment, "and I should learn to love her as

fully as the one whose footprints warm her heart."

Gripping tight his bow, and setting an arrow in it, Silveric crept from his hiding place toward the stranger, who, bitterly weeping, had hid her face in her hands. Before her Silveric's bravery vanished; he now wished he were still hidden, but it was too late. He had one thing left to do, and he resolved to do it bravely. Bending down, he gathered up the black silken hair, murmuring as he pressed it in his hands, "How beautiful! why should one so beautiful cry?"

In an instant the maiden was upon her feet. "I am not an evil spirit," Silveric said tenderly. "I should like to be your friend," he added, wanting for better words of welcome. This seeming fairness worked to his purpose, for the maiden asked, "You mean to do me no harm?" and as she spoke the words began again to cry.

"A friend will do you no harm," quickly replied Silveric, stepping nearer. "Strange maiden, tell me you name?"

"Ah, my young friend, I am an Indian goddess, living by a sea in the far east, and the name given me by the Gods of the beautiful sunset is 'Mystica.'"

"Yes, and whose child are you?"

"I am the youngest daughter of Chief Algoo-at, but—" cutting short her reply, "what is your name, and whose child are you?"

"Ah! Mystica, you have such a beautiful name I am ashamed of mine. I am Silveric Sinon, and I live far up the valley," pointing with an arrow eastward.

"And where did you find the name?"

"Ah! it is one given me by the planets, and it means I have the cunning of the coyote. And I am the first born son of Judge Sinon. And now Mystica, come and sit with me on the brink of the spring. Come, I want to tell you of my home."

For a moment timid Mystica stood unmoved, but she at last yielded; and so together they sat, talking of their respective homes.

"That is the granite mountain yonder," said Silveric, pointing with an arrow to a cragged mountain far eastward. "By it I live."

"Is it by the great sea?" asked Mystica, deeply interested.

"What means a sea?" Silveric asked innocently, having never heard the word.

"A sea is as many springs of water."

"Yes, Mystica, but I cannot reply, for I must ask my father if he has seen the sea in the west. So strange it is to me, Mystica."

"What is strange?" asked the maiden.

"Oh, our meeting in this far land."

"Yes, and as strange with me;" and Mystica arose, adding as she started away, "Silveric, you but

care to fathom the secrets of my home and people."

"Not to rob you of them," replied the youth, and added, "you are beautiful, Mystica."

"Many young men at home have told me so," and Mystica brushed back a flow of silken hair that had blown across her face.

"Why should you go? Why not stay just a little longer?" begged Silveric, a youth whose favor was with any maiden of his own tribe, at the feet of Mystica Algooat, to him almost a stranger. "I will be lonely without you," he cried, "so lonely I could die. My brother Diego is now gone, and I am alone."

"Diego! and who is he?" asked Mystica, forgetting that she wished to escape. "Is he perfect of stature and beautiful of face?" she added, much to the surprise of Silveric.

"More beautiful than I. Diego has the beauty of the Gods of the Setting Sun, while I have the riches of the land."

"Riches in land," Mystica repeated with emphasis, and then she laughed. "If it is riches in land, I care little, for there is no riches in lands—they are boundless."

"No, no, Mystica, riches in great herds of sheep."

"Sheep! what means the word? If they are lovers, I have youthful lovers more than five; and see here—"

But Silveric interrupting, asked: "And have you a tepee of your own?"

"No, I have not yet chosen him who shall build it."

"Then when shall you make this choice?" he quickly asked.

"I now live alone in my father's tepee—mother is dead—but this summer I shall make a choice," replied the girl.

"Then you have many to choose from?"

"Ah! Silveric, I have them all, they all love me."

"I am learning, too," Silveric foolishly admitted. "You become more and more beautiful, Mystica, as you tarry with me," he said.

"I tarry here! No, no, Silveric, I must go." But Silveric had called her back, promising to tell her of the great numbers of his people.

"My father's people are countless, they are as many as the leaves upon the trees," said Mystica.

"Then your father must be a chieftain?"

"Yes, Silveric, he is the Chief Algooat; and I Mystica Algooat."

"I think Mystica is such a pretty name," said the youth.

"Silveric, you are graceful of stature," Mystica said; and quickly added, "but to tell you so was silly." Then she asked Silveric to show her the sheep.

"Come with me to the mesa," he said, leading the way southward through the willow thickets.

"Hold, Silveric, is a sheep a good or bad spirit, or is it as the hound that bites or the bee that stings?"

"No, no, Mystica, my sheep are pets. See, yonder rises the dust."

"Ah! sheep are like a mighty wind, Silveric."

"No, no, my dear. Wait until nearer and I'll call them to me."

"But drive them back," Mystica cried, as she shrank from the foremost of the flock. "They're sure to harm me" she sobbed, laying her arms upon Silveric's shoulder.

"Come, Mystica, why are you frightened? They want to love you, that is all," he assured her. "As the frogs croak in the springtime, my sheep bleat, Mystica. Cheer up! cheer up! my sheep are here to make friends with you. They know well of another maiden who for moons has watched over them, and close to my side."

"Then Silveric, you are now in love with another maiden, and are fooling me. If this be so, take me back to the spring that I may go far from you."

"Why hasten, Mystica?"

"Else the maiden come; and then as you know well she will grow jealous of me."

'But she is dead, Mystica."

"Truly so?" asked the girl.

"I have told you rightly," replied Silveric. "Come, this sheep claims you as its friend for it wants to lick your hand."

"It is looking for the other maiden, and does not recognize me, for I must be strange to it. Ah! sheep trouble me, Silveric. Do let them go back to their feeding and you tell me of pleasant things, for I am tired."

"Truly, I shall, Mystica; but first, aren't you hungry?"

"I am, Silveric, for now a half moon I have lived upon the cactus fruit."

Silveric led her to his camp in the willows. "The dried flesh of sheep is new to me," said Mystica, having eaten the portion given her by Silveric.

"Then your people have not known of the sheep?"

"No, they are new to us. We live upon dried fish."

"What of the dried grape?" asked Silveric.

"Ah, dry grapes I love, for they are far sweeter than the berries growing by the sea."

"Taste these," he said; and plucked from an overhanging vine a well ripened bunch of green grapes; "these are living grapes."

Mystica looked first upon the grapes and then at the giver. "Can I whisper a promise to you, Silveric?" she asked, having first tasted the sweet fruit.

"Should you give my father a bunch of these sweet grapes, he would permit you to love me."

Then beneath the grape vine and the overhanging willow Silveric told to the one he was fast learning to love, the history of a people living beneath the shadow of a high mountain peak. And by Mystica another story was told, of a people living upon the shore of a great sea.

"Do the evil spirits live in the foothills about us?" Mystica questioned seriously.

"No, no, the evil spirits live high up in the granite mountain," assured her companion.

"Behold! the day fast goes, Silveric, and I must be away," said Mystica.

"You hasten where?" asked Silveric.

"In search of home," was the reply.

"Foolish to go now, for only a little way can you go before dark night settles about you."

"Then Silveric, I am to stay and tell Diego, your brother, of my people."

"I purpose to hide you away until Diego is gone far upon the mesa with the sheep. I have planned it all, Mystica. I shall tell Diego I am going westward to look for better pasture, and instead I'll steal away with you."

"But if I should hide away will not Diego's hounds find me?"

"No fear of that, for it is always their duty to

watch the sheep upon the mesa. Hide yourself away up along the trunk of this giant willow. Take up with you a sheep skin to shelter you against the cold night wind. Spread the vines well before. Listen, I hear voices. It is Diego and Pedro Palo, for I recognize the bark of Diego's hounds. Quick!"

Mystica nimbly passed from limb to limb and soon was far up from Silveric. "A good joke on Diego," he laughed, as he told Mystica how best to arrange every branch. Only a moment passed before a panting hound sprang in, then a second, and even to the fourth. Soon Diego stumbled in wearily, then Pedro Palo, carrying upon his shoulder a bow and a sheep-skin roll of arrows.

"Silveric deserts his sheep," panted Diego to Pedro Palo without a word to his brother. "The sheep are unguarded."

"Diego," coldly spoke Silveric, "you speak unkindly, for which I shall punish you. Before the sun's rising you lead the sheep far to the southern mesas. Remember, Diego, this is to punish you. Remember, the sheep are mine, and under my care."

"Spirits!" cried Pedro Palo, seeing the hounds leap along the tree trunk.

"Ah!" exclaimed Diego, as he ran from under the tree, "they smell an enemy."

"They smell themselves," coarsely mocked Silveric, hurling a limb at the foremost. "Diego is

afraid of himself; even an owl alighting in the tree would frighten him."

Diego said nothing, but turned back to his camp, and was soon fast asleep. Earlier in the evening Silveric had crept away to watch over the flock till Diego should relieve him. Mystica, too, had fallen asleep, but the bright moon shining through the trees awakened her some time in the night.

"Spirits, Diego! spirits, Diego!" she heard a voice exclaim suddenly, and her keen ears caught the crackling of limbs as someone dashed away through the thicket.

"Hush! it is but an owl," scolded Diego, sleepily. "The new moon disturbs Pedro." And a little later she heard him sneer to himself, "Cowardly Pedro!" She saw an owl fly between them and the moon, and she heard Diego laugh and say, "Silveric thinks I am afraid of myself, but he does not know." As she listened intently, she heard a man's retreating footsteps. Diego had snatched a small bag of dried mutton and grapes and was running toward the southern mesa.

"I am alone," sighed Mystica, as the sounds died away, "and worse than dead. There is no comfort in the croaking of the frogs in the spring, nor in the chirping of the crickets in the tree trunk. The night frightens me."

There was a sudden whir above her head, and

she knew it was the whizzing of an arrow as it glanced from bough to bough. She crouched down in terror, in doubt as to the target. Then, just above her head, a night owl flapped his wings, with the agony of a wounded creature. Below her a clear voice rang out.

"Pedro Palo would shoot to kill Silveric Sinon?"

"Ah, no, Silveric," came from a distance, "I but shot to kill an owl as it flew before the moon."

"It is well. But go, Pedro, for the coyotes scamper toward the thicket at the break of day."

Far away the voice came back. "I go."

Before the silence was complete again, Mystica heard the clear tones of Silveric calling her to come down. "Has he shot you with the arrow?" he asked, breathlessly. "We have not a moment to waste," he went on, measuring with his eye the height of the moon.

After filling a sheepskin bag with dried mutton and grapes, they slipped quietly past the spring and on through the night. As they walked, Silveric asked where the girl had been.

"In the west, searching for the hiding place of the sun," she answered.

"And where did it set?" asked Silveric, remembering that his brother Diego was named after the setting sun.

"From my home I could see it sink among the

low hills," she said. "But I found that it set still farther west, in the valleys. Then I came on to the valleys, but even yet I have not found it. When you saw me on the hill-top I was lost."

Far in the east the sun crept up into the heavens. As it rose it reflected its burning flame squarely against the hills to the westward. The groves of bare cactus and the leafless bush in the valley below were mirroring the same steady glare. The shadows of the dawning had given way to the brightness of mid-day.

Presently Silveric stopped under the shade of a live oak. "The sun burns to-day," he complained, looking at her curiously.

"If the heat were my only trouble," she said slowly, "I would be well content."

"Are you lonely, Mystica?" asked Silveric, "or does my presence comfort you?"

There was no reply.

"Would you rather die out here in the mountains than live with my people?" he persisted, looking into her eyes.

"I want to live with you always, Silveric," she sobbed, as he took her in his arms. "But let us go to my home, and I promise you one-half of my father's authority. Is not power greater to you than wealth? Sheep live and sheep die, but my father's authority lives on with the life of his people. If he will not consent, do with me as you will."

CHAPTER II.

SILVERIC ENTRAPPED.

Suddenly a sound caught the girl's ear. She listened a moment in doubt. A faint bark came out of the distance, then another.

"My father's hounds!" cried Mystica.

Silveric sprang upon a boulder, from which he could see the country in all directions. For a moment neither spoke. It was the girl who broke the silence.

"Hide!" she whispered, "hide!"

With a bound he reached a dense thicket of manzanito trees. It was a poor place, but there was no time to lose. Already the hounds were racing down the sloping hill-side. As they reached her the great dogs sprang toward her with glad cries of recognition. The next instant her father's arms were around her.

But even as the Indian escorts were dancing about the group, the hounds scented their prey, and neared the thicket. Silveric offered up a prayer to the Acron Gods, and as he prayed, there came to him a new sound, the barking of other hounds. With a joyful cry he recognized the dogs. "They are mine,"

he told himself exultingly, "mine, mine; my Riazer, my Papet, my Arnie!"

But they were not here. One of the others sprang at him and fastened its sharp teeth in his thigh. He tried to frighten it off, but his voice was pitifully weak. Then, with a rush that bore all before them, his faithful hounds were upon the enemy.

The fight was short. Outnumbered, cowed by the savageness of the newcomers, and lacking their fierceness, the two dogs were soon dead, fairly torn to pieces. Silveric's hounds were bleeding from many wounds and crept to the friendly shelter of the manzanito thicket.

Silveric sprang from his hiding place. "My hounds have power, Mystica, as could shake the granite mountains." He called each by name, and it came running to him. With a word of encouragement, he made them attack the two escorts, and they closed in upon the frightened men with gnashing teeth and low growls. As they fought, Chief Algooat, Mystica's father, fitted an arrow to his bow. But Silveric was watching, and grappled him on the instant. The chief was old and Silveric easily threw him to the ground.

"Don't kill my father," cried Mystica, as she saw Arnie, the third hound, catch him by the shoulder. After a minute, Silveric called off the beast. But he stood with folded arms while the

hounds killed the escorts, and not till it was all over and the two Indians lay on the ground, mangled and torn beyone recognition, did Silveric regret what he had done.

It was late in the day before the sad scene of the morning conflict was left behind. The hounds remained with Silveric till he decided all danger past and sent them back to guard the sheep. Chief Algooat soon won his confidence by making many promises, and the youth rapidly yielded to the cunning of the old man. He little comprehended that he was being spurred on into prolonged captivity by the lashes of love, for all risks were now hidden in Mystica Algooat and the promises of her father. And so that evening the three sat warming themselves before a little fire high up in the mountains.

"I suppose I am a foolish youth, my chief," said Silveric, for the first time thinking of what he had given up to follow Mystica.

"Rather a wise youth," responded the old chief, gravely, turning to Mystica and pointing to her beautiful hair.

"Am I wholly intoxicated with love for her?" Silveric asked himself, "or am I crazed?"

Early the next morning Silveric proposed that he start back, but the old chief persuaded him to continue.

"Why not see my people?" he asked, as they drew within sight of a vast sea.

"I care little for the vengeance of your people, it is true," Silveric answered, "for if I chose I could call a legion of hounds to fight for me."

"True," said the chief, soberly; "I had forgotten that you were a man of spirits."

"They obey me always; were I to call to them now they would come and tear you to pieces. See!" And he made a show of calling to them.

"No, no; do not call them," begged the chief, in great terror.

Never before had Silveric seen the sun rising on a great inland sea. The sight was inspiring, and a new world was unfolded to him.

"Is not the sea beautiful?" asked Mystica presently, fearing his silence.

"It is, indeed," said Silveric, gazing admiringly at the vast expanse of water, on which the sun shone brightly.

"My daughter," interrupted the chief, "is named after the beauties of the sea."

"Ah!" answered Silveric, turning to her as if he had never noticed her closely before, "she, too, is beautiful."

"The Goddess of the Sunset is an appropriate name," went on the chief, evidently bent on pleasing the younger man.

Silveric noticed the unusual graciousness, and asked the reason.

"The Indian," explained Chief Algooat, "always endeavors to please the spirits."

"Look!" interrupted Mystica, "behold the numbers of my father's people; see how they move yonder along the seashore."

Silveric followed her gaze, and there was surprise in his voice when he spoke.

"As a flock of birds," he said, wonderingly.

They passed silently into the village. The chief stopped once to quiet Silveric's conversation, but the Indian only laughed at him, asking him why he should fear the tribe, when he could summon help at any time.

"But if they hear of your great power," pleaded Mystica, "they will drown themselves in the sea."

So they stole on quietly till they reached the chief's teepee, where Silveric was securely hidden. Once alone, he laughed at the way in which he had frightened the chief by pretending to possess the strange power.

A wind had been blowing all day. Toward night it had increased in violence till it became a sea gale, rushing southward with terrific force. Silveric prayed to the Acron God for more wind, and fell asleep at last, weary with the long walk.

It was the middle of the night when he awoke. A form was bending over him, and a moment later he heard her whisper:

"Father's people are drowning themselves."

"But what can I do?" he asked, springing to his feet in alarm.

"Save them, Silveric."

"But I cannot," he cried, not thinking of what the assertion meant.

"But you must," she protested. "They have cut their naked limbs till the blood drips like water into the sand. Father is powerless, for they have discovered your presence. If you cannot save them, you must escape into the mountains, that they may be calmed when they know you are no longer here. See, here are dried fish for you to eat, and here is father's long bow and his roll of arrows. Go quickly, that this storm that you have created may cease."

For a moment Silveric's heart was filled with joy. Here was the chance to escape for which he had been longing. Then he thought of Mystica, and all that he had sacrificed for her, and he longed to stay. But as he reasoned with himself the cries of the crazed Indians came to him from a distance, and the fear that they might swarm upon him made him go.

A few steps from the sheltering teepee he heard Mystica sobbing. He listened, and as the cry rose and died away, he knew she was mourning for him. He paused irresolute in the dark night. A flash of lightning showed him the path to the mountains, and

with a prayer to the Acron Gods for their blessing upon Mystica, he plunged toward the hills.

High up on the mountains Silveric heard faintly the whining of terror-stricken beasts. As he paused to listen a sudden fear overcame him and he began to pray. "Oh, Acron Gods," he pleaded, "give Silveric Sinon the power the Indians believe he has." As the wind caught up his voice, he realized as never before his helplessness among the beasts of the mountains.

He never knew how long that stormy night he stumbled about over crags and cuts and close to wild animals that prowled among the rocks. He only knew, upon gaining his full senses, that he had been wandering all night, for the great storm was now nearly spent. He looked backward and caught the glare of many flickering fires in the distance. He paused but an instant and then plunged onward.

"While they lash themselves till the blood drips to the sand," he told himself, "I am escaping."

Daylight broke at last, and he made out the one granite peak that he had known so long and well. It lay to the east of his home. A fierce determination to go on and on came over him, and he ran with all his might, heedless of where he went.

Suddenly his foot caught and he fell with a cry. Down and down he fell to the lowest depths of the canyon. When consciousness came back to him he

found his ankle sprained. There was no water at hand, and his leg pained him severely. He was utterly disheartened.

"For Mystica," he said scornfully, "I have disinherited my riches in sheep. Love is vanity." He remembered how she had driven him out in the storm and he sobbed as he thought of it.

About him was an endless reach of granite. Granite! Granite! everywhere he looked was granite. The torture on his swollen leg became almost unbearable, and he rolled over on his face as one does in death agony.

"I am a fool!" he told himself, bitterly. "A fool!" And a little later: "But no! Fools die, I die."

He dozed off into a disturbed sleep presently, and woke to hear a persistent drip, drip, drip of water. It clicked in his ears like an unreality, and he listened, only half believing it. But it was true. Rain in the mountains must have swollen the creeks. So Silveric breathed a prayer of thanks to his Acron God, and dragged himself to the clear water which he drank eagerly.

Contented with the presence of water, he lived by the little creek for several days, eating dried fish. After several days he decided to move on, and rose to his feet with that intention. But his ankle still pained him, and he sank back with a sob of despair, wishing for life to end. One night he firmly set his

arrow in the ground, with the head upward that he might fall upon it. But his courage oozed away, and he lay back and cried instead.

But the days of rest strengthened the ankle, and after a time he began to make his way down the canyon, at times sliding over the steep granite ledges, and always hoping for rescue.

One day he came upon a heap of whitened bones and he asked himself if he were to be a pile of bones in the promised paradise. Then he laughed bitterly.

"I am a fool," Silveric told himself. "I have permitted the liking for a strange goddess to drag me here that I waste my bones in the Indian's future. But no, it cannot be. I have found the hiding place of the bad Indian, Felix, and these are the remains of the Indians he has killed."

Frightened at this discovery he glanced about him, wondering if the enclosure into which he had fallen had an escape. He soon decided it had none. As he pondered, he grew more serious, for when night came he felt Felix might fall upon him. Silveric realized his weakness, and time and time again he acknowledged it to the Acron God, asking for a power by which he might win favor with Felix should he be discovered.

Night came and went, and still Silveric had not seen Felix. He grew impatient as time passed, and one day he searched the enclosure, finding a single

heap of dry bones, which he at once decided were those of Felix. Happy over this discovery, he sat down to complete the eating of the remaining fish. Roughly folded in the bottom of the little sack he found a small piece of pure white fibre. On it were these words: "Mystica Algooat has chosen thee to build her tepee." It was signed in faultless handwriting, "Goddess of the Sunset."

"Does Mystica mean me?" Silveric questioned. "I fear not." He re-read it. "Ah, but it must be so!" He examined the fibre more carefully and found other words. These he deciphered to read, "For ten long summers have I written this decision." At this message Silveric hung his head for many minutes. At last he said soberly, "Either I must go back to the sea, or like a youth of little character flee further into the mountains. Both I cannot do." So after arguing with himself, he finally decided first to go home and then to cross the mountains to reclaim Mystica.

Further back in a darkened corner of this stone enclosure Silveric discovered many well-strung bows and full rolls of arrows. In sheepskin bags he found great quantities of dried meat and grapes and even fermented grape juice. Proud as he was over his discovery, he did not forget to promise his sacred Acron God that he would be a better man.

It was broad day many moons later when Silveric

left the stone enclosure for the purpose of seeing once more his old home. As he stood upon a bluff overlooking his father's tepee, the shades of night were just settling. Far to the westward, through the shadows of evening, he outlined faintly above the horizon great clouds of smoke, as if stirred by the hoofs of many sheep. In silence he watched the clouds float across the crimson sky. Moments passed before he gave way and when he did he said soberly, "I see what is to me a lost inheritance."

Then Silveric Sinon cried like a child.

CHAPTER III.

A GREAT FEAST INAUGURATED.

Silveric looked up suddenly and beheld another scene. His eyes told him it was a battle such as his father had taught him was fought long years before his birth. Young Silveric, fearing not death, only laughed at the thought of being killed by an arrow. And so a great longing for war came over Silveric, and without thinking of the results, he ran swiftly down the mountain side to his father's tepee.

"Unknown Indians born out of the rocks in a single day have come to destroy us," gasped faintly an old woman to whom Silveric applied for information.

Puzzled by the expression, he ran on to his father's tepee. It was deserted. Silveric's heart was touched to the core; so he only paused to refresh himself by a drink of grape juice, and then ran forward to join the battle.

Night was fast mantling the fighting Indians as he drew near them. Still, he could distinguish the arrows rising and planting themselves in the low,

bushy thickets. Heedless of the many warning cries, he plunged deep into the conflict. His good Acron God had whispered to him to be brave, and he feared his father might be overpowered at the front. His courage rose high as he swept through his fellows, and they seemed to recognize their leader.

The closing shades of night soon hid the fighters on either side, and the conflict closed without a victor.

"Oh, my good son, Silveric!" the good judge cried, as he threw his arms about the young man. "You have saved your father in his old age."

"Yes, I have saved my father," Silveric repeated dully, and fell to the ground, weakened by an arrow in his side.

The Indians who examined him announced that though Silveric had received a very painful wound it would not necessarily be fatal. They were right, for during the night, Silveric, strengthened by a sound sleep, stirred himself to inquire the result of the battle.

"Without a result," replied a stalwart escort of his father; "the darkness has saved us from defeat. Our chief has been slain and as we have no leader we are about to give up to the enemy." An early surrender was all for which the Indians could hope.

With the moon's rising, Judge Sinon called for a gathering of his most trusted followers. They were

to plan as to the manner of acknowledging defeat. The promise of this surrender weighed heavily upon proud Silveric, and his plans alternated between two courses of action. One was to kill himself and avoid the disgrace of defeat; the other was to flee to the stone enclosure high up in the mountains from which point he could revenge the severe treatment to which his father would be subjected in the hands of his captors.

"I shall escape into the mountain," was his first decision. He ran a little way and then stopped. "I am a fool to be afraid," he reconsidered. "I shall present myself as one possessing the power of calling the hounds." And he turned toward the hills that gleamed with many little fires.

"Hold back, Chief Algooat's brave fighter," came the words, as he drew within the light of the first flickering fire.

"I hold back—no!" he said. "I have a message my father sends to the enemy; will you take it?"

"Bring it here." Silveric acquiesced.

"I shall;" and soon he stood facing a young Indian woman.

"Who are you," Silveric asked, "that without the power of the hounds dares interrupt me?"

"I interrupt anyone save the man of spirits, by name Silveric Sinon."

"Yes, and who is this Silveric?"

"He herds the sheep far down the valley."

"I am more powerful than he, maiden. Come with me." Silveric gripped the young Indian woman by the wrist and led her down the hillside. "Now tell me again, who is this Silveric?"

"He herds the sheep far down the valley," was the reply, as before.

"What is your name, and whose child are you?" he asked abruptly.

"Ah, young man, Silveric Sinon, of whom I speak, once asked me the same question; you are not he?" Then she added quickly, "He is as graceful of stature as you."

"Yes, and who are you?"

"I am Mystica Algooat, the Goddess of the Sunset."

"Is it possible?" Silveric gasped, pausing as if to study out some decision.

"I owe Silveric Sinon my beauty, and without him I die alone," added the young Indian woman, arousing silent Silveric.

"Oh, good Acron Gods," he breathed in thanks. Then he turned to the girl. "I am Silveric Sinon," he told her.

"See, Silveric, for you be he, the dawn is breaking; take this message to your father." Mystica unfolded a small sheet of pure white fibre.

"What does it mean?" Silveric asked suspi-

ciously, doubting its value, and fearing that by this means Mystica would escape him.

"It means peace between your father's people and mine," she answered. "Be away, Silveric; I cannot wait longer than the breaking of the day."

So Silveric took the little sheet of fibre, and ran to deliver the message.

"Peace! Ah, Chief Algooat says peace!" Silveric cried, as he stumbled in before his father.

"Chief Algooat says peace," repeated the old man, "and who is he?"

"Chief of the Indians by the inland sea. His people are as many as the rocks upon the hills, and their arrows as the leaves upon the trees. To please Mystica, Chief Algooat spares us defeat."

"I fear the terms are severe."

"No, father, for all are to live in peace, he to become chieftain, and you to remain judge."

"You are mine! mine! mine!" Silveric told Mystica, as he folded her in his arms and kissed her. "Show me to your father, for he knows well of me."

"I shall, Silveric, and gladly."

Presently he was ushered into the presence of her father, "Is this the man with the power of many hounds?" asked Chief Algooat, recognizing Silveric the moment he stepped within the light of the fire.

"I am he," Silveric replied firmly, retaining an

authoritative poise. "Fortunately, you sent the message just in time, Chief, for I was talking seriously of destroying you and your followers with a legion of hounds."

"To be certain, I sent Mystica with the message of peace long ago," Chief Algooat replied, as though fearful of Silveric's great power.

"Fortunately you did, for without those easy terms I should not have spared you until morning breaks. Come Chief Algooat," and Silveric led the way to the camp of his father, the judge. Here he watched through the strange ceremonies by which the chief and judge signed articles of peace.

Immediately on either side orders were given out that not an arrow be set in the bow, nor the sign be heard for battle. All were for consultation in the open valley, and so the universal command brought together the Indians of the valley and the Indians of the sea.

With the shades of night falling, the Indian court closed, fullest terms of peace being agreed upon. A feast was in order, and the Indian women were soon busily spreading out upon the sheepskins great quantities of dried meat and grapes, while the young men brought forth vessels of fermented grape juice.

So successful had been the first night's reception, and so plenteous and dainty the spread, that the In-

dians of the sea, without a moment's consideration, begged to be allowed to transfer all they possessed over the mountains to what seemed to be a new Paradise.

By the next day the grape juice, of which each had drunk freely, was having a marked effect. Friendly indulgence was fast turning into drunken revelry. The festive spread was now losing its charm, and presently the planet dance was substituted in its stead. Around Chief Algooat and Judge Sinon the Indians danced wildly. To increase the excitement, at times a single dancer, crazed by drink, would jump in by the side of the chief or judge, and to the delight of the others cut his naked body until from the loss of blood he would faint. Like a slain brute he was dragged away, but soon another dancer would perform the same feat. When the night's ceremonies were ended, Algooat was duly crowned Chief, Sinon Judge, Mystica, Goddess of the Sunset, and Silveric heir to the tribe's riches in sheep.

Broad day broke upon the dancers, and one by one they disbanded, each to search for some quiet, shady spot where he might lie down and sleep. Another nightfall, and the dancing and feasting were resumed, the ties of friendship still kept hot in the process of welding. At length the festivity drew near its close. Industriously the Indians began the task of carrying over the mountains that which each possessed.

As the time passed Chief Algooat saw that the vast enclosure about the village of the valley Indians was far too small, and so one day in the Indian Court he ordered it torn away. His words were: "Spread out with your homes and inhabit the valley from the rising of the sun in the east to its setting in the west." The size of the tribe of valley Indians was soon so large that its former smallness was forgotten, becoming, as it seemed, in a single moon, a tribe with members as many as the grapes upon the vines in the lowlands.

As the first days passed, all attention was given to the tribe's early prosperity. Old and unsafe tepees were taken down, and in their places new ones of mud brick, with thatched roofs were erected. The stagnant pool of water out of which the Indians had long drunk was condemned, and to supply the wants of the people wholesome water resources were developed. Everywhere was improvement.

In due time Silveric Sinon brought before his father his claim to the tribe's riches in sheep. He had learned that Diego had become the heir on the grounds of his brother's supposed death. So Silveric denounced Diego's claim, but he was loath to push the matter because of the fact that Diego had divided the inheritance with Theophilus Algooat, a brother of Mystica.

Judge Sinon was sore at heart. Often in imagi-

nation he had pictured the conflict in which Silveric slew Diego. There was but one thing to do, however, and in the secrecy of the court he gave a decision awarding to Silveric the inheritance. Silveric now hastened before the two men, quick to present his claim. The instant Diego and Theophilus heard of the decision they were angry. With vengeance in their hearts, they ran to their homes, gathered up a small bag of dried mutton and grapes, and fled together to the mountains, to be alone with their plottings.

Many suns rose and set before they returned. In the meantime Mystica watched with Silveric as he sat by his sheep. As the animals nibbled all about them, Silveric told the girl of many things, and the time came when they whispered tales of love.

After the friendship had given way to something more, Silveric told Mystica of the stone enclosure high up in the mountains. One day the eclipse of the sun came to him as a sign, and he studied long the shadows to discover its meaning. His heart, he decided, was shaded like unto the sun. "One shall be like the other," he told himself, "for some disaster is creeping upon me." So he became very grave, and one day went so far as to ask Mystica to flee with him to the stone enclosure to live there alone with him unmolested. But the girl was far-seeing, and overturned Silveric's plans with a firm reply.

"No Silveric," she said, "the Goddess of the Sunset does not want to disgrace herself by living in a stone enclosure haunted by the spirit of a bad man."

"A curt reply I have received," and Silveric hung his head.

"All is for the best," Mystica said gently. Then she asked him to tell her of more pleasant things.

"You are very strict with me, Mystica " he replied, soberly, as though he were fast losing all hope of having her by his side through his declining years.

"I do it for the best, Silverie," was all she would say.

Now Silveric had won favor with her father, the chief, by his frequent calls at the tepee. So as time went on he was given a glad consent when he asked to marry her. The threats of Diego and Theophilus were almost forgotten.

But early one morning they returned. Secreting themselves just before Chief Algooat's tepee, they waited for Silveric, concluding rightly that he would be coming to get Mystica to watch the sheep during the day. They calculated well, for Silveric, true as the sun-rise, came slowly over the trail leading to the tepee. They heard the low hum of his favorite love chants and they knew he was happy. He caught a glimpse of the two young plotters as he came along, but thinking they were youths playing some game he

passed them by without a thought of danger.

Suddenly there was a loud cheer, and Theophilus urged his hounds upon Silveric, who turned and fled for the open door of Chief Algooat's tepee. But the hounds were far too fleet of foot for poor Silveric and were fast overtaking him. He gave a single call for help, and in another instant Mystica came running to his rescue. She beat away the hounds till they cowed at her feet. The next instant Silveric spoke angrily to Theophilus, telling him that should he ever again attempt such a trick he would call upon Judge Sinon for sentence.

The words set Mystica to pondering, and knowing that her lover meant them and realizing the possible consequences, she reproved her brother sharply. But he, being only a boy at heart, laughed at her words of warning, and as soon as he had another chance repeated the offense. For a second time Mystica reproved him, but he only laughed and ran around the tepee.

Diego and Theophilus were soon fleeing across the mountains toward the deserted village by the sea, to there await till the excitement abated before venturing back. It was many moons later when they returned, to find the Indians happily conducting the feast in honor of the plenteous rain. Here they were gathered dancing, there chanting festival songs. Not

a few were drunk and in their intoxication groveling in the dust.

When Diego and Theophilus crept close to the camp, the feast was at its highest pitch. The planet dances were the order of the celebration, and in harmony each dancer circled round and round upon a great spread of sheepskin.

"See, there is Silveric dancing with my sister," whispered Theophilus to Diego. "I'll trip him up if you will wrestle with him, should he demand it."

"I will," firmly replied Diego, straightening himself as if to show Theophilus the muscles of his legs.

Round and round circled the planet dancers, each turn bringing the couple nearer and nearer.

"Now for his fall," Theophilus shouted, as he braced himself close by the outer circle.

In a minute the chance came. Theophilus tripped Silveric, felling him upon his back. But the warrior was up in a second, and in another armed with a large stone ax.

"Where is the tempter?" he asked an Indian gruffly.

"There," said one, pointing out Theophilus.

"You!" shouted Silveric, in great rage, striking at him with his weapon. Diego had quickly turned and fled, but Theophilus was more easily overtaken, and in another moment Silveric had killed him.

The awful crime was now done, and Diego, like a boy fearful of the consequences of his act, ran to his home. Mystica Algooat, wondering what had happened, asked Silveric to join her in the final bow before the planets.

"I have killed Theophilus," Silveric answered coolly.

"Not my brother?" she gasped.

"I did, for I thought he would be better dead than alive."

"Oh, God of the Waters," wailed Mystica, running hither and thither in search of her father. "Theophilus is dead," she moaned again. And the cry was taken up and drowned in a babel of tongues by the Indian dancers.

Chief Algooat tightened his lips when he heard it. "Silveric must be instantly killed," he commanded.

For the first time search for the slayer was begun. It soon proved to be too late, for he was nowhere to be seen. The Indians conceived the idea that he had been spirited away to the mountains, and of a truth he was fleeing far up into the towering hills, murmuring as he ran, "I shall inhabit the stone enclosure and become a bad man like Felix."

So he crept to the stone enclosure and hid himself in a dark corner. Here he lived for many moons.

Early one evening, months later, for the first

time since his flight, he stood looking down upon the home from which he had been driven. The Indians were prospering now, it seemed. The sheep were feeding upon the green pastures, and this of itself made his heart sore.

"I have been robbed of my riches," he told himself, bitterly, "and even if I should get them back they will be taken from me again. Nothing is left now but revenge." And stamping his foot fiercely, he turned his back upon the scene and was gone.

This time he went even further back into the mountains to gather poisonous berries out of which he might obtain a deadly extract. This he would spill in the springs, he determined, and the many Indians drinking from them would be poisoned.

Only a few moons had passed before he stood once more upon the bluff overlooking his home. Upon one shoulder he was steadying a great stone vessel containing the poisonous extract he had cunningly made. For a long time he stood in silence, looking down upon the spring as it oozed past the tepee of Chief Algooat. He wished the chief to die, but he dared nor poison the spring lest another, one dear to him even yet, should drink from it. For Mystica had always been true to Silveric, and even as he stood there now he was ready to admit it.

"No," he said , "I cannot. Sooner would I drink of it myself than allow it to poison Mystica Algooat."

CHAPTER IV.

SILVERIC SINON THE TAUQUITZ OR EVIL SPIRIT.

Silveric was about to break the jar and spill the extract upon the ground, but even as he was putting his thought into action his eye caught sight of the flock of sheep. The thought of these having been robbed from him rekindled the passion within his heart, and thirsting for revenge he crept down the bluff toward the spring. For a moment he looked into the clear water, but he could not poison it with the knowledge that Mystica Algooat would drink from it. Openly and to his Acron God, he renounced the attempt he had made at her life, and stole back to the bluff. Once more he looked toward the valley, and once more his eye rested upon the flock of sheep. For the third time revenge was in his heart, this time too strong to be overcome. Down the valley, as he well knew, were other springs and into these he determined to scatter the drops of poison he had prepared. He made haste to do this, and then stole quietly back to the thicket, from which he watched the Indians come with their jars to dip the poisoned water.

Once he felt a sharp pang of conscience. A maiden whom he loved almost as dearly as he did Mystica came to the spring, filled her jar, and walked back over the hill—to death. The knowledge that he had poisoned her so affected Silveric that on the spur of the moment he hurled the jar upon the ground in horror, breaking it into a hundred pieces.

"I will kill myself," he swore, and turned and ran into the mountains.

After a few moons of concealment, he ventured back to his vantage point, from which he could see the people whom he was attempting to exterminate. As he glanced upon them for the first time, tears sprang to his eyes. Only a few moved in and out among the deserted tepees. Nearer at hand, with the sod yet freshly turned, were scores of graves.

Frightened at the terrible success of his scheme, Silveric crouched low till the sun set. A great dread was upon him; he wished to discover if his father or any dear to him, had perished by his hand. With nightfall he ventured into the village. He went first to the tepee of a maiden who had long been true to him; it lay white and deserted, with the gloom of death all about. With a great sorrow gnawing at his heart, he crept toward the newly made graves. At last he found it, pitifully bare and gaunt. On the white sheepskin were the words: "Blucheal Lallea, whose breath was taken away by Tauquitz."

"By Tauquitz," repeated Silveric to himself. "By Tauquitz; it means by an evil spirit of the mountains." And the fear left him, and a sense of his power and greatness took its place. He laughed a little, and parted his lips as he promised the granite mountains that he would campaign against the Indians. Surely he was insane; for he turned in the darkness and ran headlong back to his stone enclosure, boasting of his prowess should another spirit rise up to stay him.

A few more moons passed, and again he stood looking upon the village. This time there was no sorrow in his heart, but only gladness. As he watched from the high bluff he clapped his hands gleefully and cried aloud in his joy. For below him he could see the Indians performing the Mysteries of Disease, and he knew some dreaded scourge or plague was upon them to help him exterminate the race.

The memory of Mystica Algooat was still fresh in his heart, and when night came he crept into the village and searched among the new graves. He read many epitaphs, but could find none telling of her death.

"But all must die," he swore. "Before the falling of the leaves all must have passed away. Twenty moons more and not an Indian shall be alive." And with this vow Silveric was gone.

The mission of Silveric Sinon in life may be

questioned. It is probable that the Indians, though industrious, were constantly drinking of the grape juice. The author is convinced that Silveric's course in more ways than one, was a God-send to the tribe, if only to keep them sober. The Tauquitz was chosen, I believe, to perform noble deeds rather than to fulfill the mission of a bad man.

Only through fear of total annihilation did Chief Algooat refrain from uniting his followers and hunt out Tauquitz in his mountain home, destroying him, and returning home to live sober, industrious lives.

Silveric lost all count of time, but it is probable that many moons passed with Tauquitz still preying upon the Indians. The frequent deaths spurred Chief Algooat to action. He resolved to destroy Tauquitz or be himself destroyed. So one morning he crept from tepee to tepee, whispering at each door, "Arise, brave men; your chief says come." And each time the answer came back, "Yes, chief, do we go to fight Tauquitz?" From every tepee came a stalwart warrior, and soon Chief Algooat felt as one who had unlimited power; for his fighters were loyal, brave and strong, and, above all else, thirsting for victory over Tauquitz. And that morning at sunrise, the Indians performed mysterious feats before the Acron Tree, testing themselves with the question, "Have I the courage to fight against a supreme being?"

Early the next day the Indians organized and equipped themselves for the attack. On the very point of departure, Mystica stepped to her father's side and asked if he knew where to find the terrible Tauquitz. For a moment Chief Algooat was perplexed; for neither he nor his followers had any idea as to where the bad man might be discovered. Mystica was thinking of the stone enclosure high up in the mountains, of which Silveric had told her; but she was loath to speak of it. Then another thought came to her.

"Father," she said, "let me go for three moons, and if the Gods of the Acron Tree bless me I shall know the home of Tauquitz when I return."

"Go, Mystica, go," prayed her father. And every Indian took up the cry: "Go, go!"

"Yes, my daughter, go," commanded the chief, when the cries had died out, "and may the Acron Gods bless you and my warriors. Brothers, wait till three moons have risen before you call at my tepee, when you will find me rejoicing over Mystica's return, or weeping because I believe she has been destroyed by Tauquitz." And although he tried to speak hopefully, he had little thought that his daughter would escape the slayer who lived high up in the mountains.

That evening Diego Sinon came to the chief's tepee. The youth was rapidly becoming a leader

among the younger warriors, and there were many who predicted that he would become chieftain after the death of Algooat. Mystica felt little pangs of jealousy when Diego chanted love songs with the other maidens, and once she had vowed to win Diego for her own or die in the attempt.

On this evening she and the youth chanted many love songs and told many tales, and when Diego at last went home Mystica walked a little way with him. "Diego loves me," she told herself, after he had gone. "But Diego would marry a girl who is brave; so will I go into the mountains and prove to him my great courage."

That night she swung in her hammock, trying to refresh her memory as to the location of the stone enclosure. All that Silveric had told her came back presently, and well satisfied that she could find it she fell asleep. The earliest morning hours, before the sun had appeared in the east, she spent in humblest supplication to the Acron Gods. Just at sunrise she began the ascent of the bushy foothill skirting the rear of her home. It was no little undertaking for a maiden of twenty-three to set out, alone, on foot, to search out a destroying demon.

An hour's wandering brought her face to face with a somber granite mountain. Tired and discouraged, she sat down to rest and recall the directions Silveric had once given her. The trail, she remem-

bered him saying, led along the bottom of the canyon in a zigzag course. A little search showed her faint footprints. Slowly pushing her way forward, she came suddenly upon the bold inscription, carved upon a great boulder: "An Indian passing further into the mountains than this shall be pursued and killed."

Frightened as she was, she was sure the writing was of a familiar hand, and she went close to study it. "Ah, Silveric Sinon but fools me," she muttered contemptuously, and pushed forward with renewed courage, laughing as she walked.

The trail presently led upward over a high mountain ridge. Here she found another warning, similar to the first. She did not heed it, but offered a prayer to the Acron God and went on.

The sun dropped behind the hills to the west. The shadows thickened all about her. Coyotes yelped on every side. Her heart was throbbing painfully, and presently she could see the trail no longer. She was lost in the mountains.

"Silveric," she cried, "oh, Silveric Sinon!"

Suddenly her cries died out. Stalking from the darkness was a silent figure.

"I am not Silveric," said a gruff voice, "but the powerful Tauquitz." He gripped her wrist tightly. Together they stumbled along in the darkness. Once she fell, and her captor commanded her to walk more carefully. "You but fall in fun," he said.

On and on they pushed till the night was nearly spent. Mystica was almost too tired to walk, and fell frequently. At last, however, they came to a stone enclosure, walled with granite. Into this they went, and her captor said gruffly, "Stay here till the morning breaks. To escape is impossible, and your life will pay the forfeit if you attempt it."

Badly frightened, Mystica lay for a long time where she had fallen. She feared even to speak to her captor, as he might become angry and kill her at once. At last, thoroughly worn out, she fell asleep.

Day was breaking when she awoke. All about her glistened the granite walls. Before her lay the form of a sleeping man, with a great stone ax close beside it, and several earthen vessels some distance away. She could detect the odor of fermented grape juice, and she decided that her captor was now intoxicated. Her first thought was to kill him with the ax and then escape. But the words of an old saying came to her, "Kill him who kills thee." Still, the deed was too great a crime, and she let pass the right moment, greatly through fear of superstition.

All through the forenoon Mystica waited for Tauquitz to stir, but it was late in the afternoon before he finally opened his eyes. He looked at her drowsily for a minute.

"How did you get here, you strange creature?" he asked.

"You brought me here," Mystica replied.

"You lie, and I can prove it. I am Tauquitz, and Tauquitz brings none but the dead to his sacred domain. You must die."

He lifted the great stone ax, and Mystica was sorely frightened. She looked at the man in dread, not knowing what to do or say.

"Would you kill the Goddess of Sunset?" she asked.

Tauquitz repeated the words. "The Goddess of Sunset—the Goddess of Sunset. Are you Mystica Algooat, then?"

"I am none other," answered the girl; and are you not Tauquitz, who poisoned the spring and scattered disease among the Indians?"

The man laughed. "How dare such a frail creature as you question me?" he asked. "But as you are weak, I do not fear to answer. I am Tauquitz, and I did poison the spring and scatter disease among your father's people. But you—why are you wandering about, high up in the mountains?"

"I am searching for Silveric Sinon," answered Mystica, simply. "Have you his bones secreted?"

"And what would you do with his bones?"

"I would worship them," she said. "And I know he has passed this way, because I saw his handwriting on the rocks. I could die for him, for he and I have often watched the sheep together."

"But Silveric killed your brother."

"My brother, Tauquitz, was to blame, for he tripped Silveric."

"Ah, Goddess," said the man softly, "you have made my stone heart tender. I know not what to do; it seems the spirit of Felix, the bad Indian, is within me. I drink of the grape juice he made, and I long to destroy the Indians. I was drunk when I poisoned the spring. I—" he stopped as he saw Mystica's bright eyes upon him.

"Are you not Silveric Sinon?" she asked suddenly.

"Question me not," he said, "for my heart burns within me, and my decision is at fault."

With these words, Tauquitz began once more to drink of the grape juice, and soon he was lying on the floor in a drunken stupor. Mystica resolved to make her escape, if it were possible, and crept toward the entrance. Once outside, she ran swiftly down the trail till once more she looked down upon her father's own tepee.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT TAUQUITZ CAPTURED.

On the day of Mystica's departure into the mountains, Roamka Lugo, the skilled workman of the tribe, carved her name in the bark of the Sacred Acron Tree. Judge Sinon, passing by at the time, remarked that it was a dedication to her sacrifice.

The sun rose and set, and still she did not return. At the appointed hour, the faithful men of the tribe visited the tepee of the chief, where they found him lying on a sheepskin mat and crying bitterly. As the time passed revenge surged into the heart of each Indian and was his only thought. Even the youths of but a few summers were filled with the desire to destroy Tauquitz.

There was but one hope left, that the beauty of Mystica would win favor with the evil spirit. Rialtez Luzon, to whom all mysteries were plain, was consulted, and answered with a smile, "Have no fear, for even such a hard-hearted man as Tauquitz would fall in love with the maiden. Her beauty shames the flowers in the garden."

Chief Algooat was now past his one hundredth year, and a successor was chosen. His son, Theophilus, would of course have been his choice had he been alive. As it was, he turned to Diego, conferring upon him the honor with the words, "To Diego Sinon I give the chieftainship of this tribe upon my death."

All the next day he danced before the fire, and all that night he tortured himself with piercing cactus thongs. He was now ready for the final test. So that night, with wives, children and dogs, all the Indians gathered on the fireground and the strange ceremonies began. The rhythm of the weird Indian music entered into the very heart of the chief and filled him with courage. Till the hour of midnight he swayed back and forth, and then, exhausted and half intoxicated, he sank back into the dust, and saw deep mysteries in the curling smoke of the fire. Blood dripped from his bruised sides, his bones ached from the restless hours of dancing; yet the thought of revenge killed all pain.

Suddenly a cry rang out upon the night air. "Mystica Algooat has escaped from Tauquitz, and comes bringing victory over the evil spirit."

Chief Algooat uttered a cry of joy, and every Indian within hearing took it up, shouting till the hills echoed and re-echoed with the sound. Dancing and chanting took the place of mourning, and each pictured in his imagination a victory over Tauquitz and

a prosperous and increasing tribe of Indians once more.

Mystica was the idol of the hour. Beautiful, tall in stature, with eyes that shone over prominent cheek bones like glittering stones of black, with hair swaying and waving like skeins of purest silk, she was indeed attractive. Nor was this all; she had the courage possessed by few other maidens of the tribe. It was no wonder, then, that lovers besieged her on every side. But it was Diego Sinon that she greeted with a pleased smile, and it was not long till he had her promise of marriage. Both believed it would be well not to marry till the hunt for Tauquitz was past, and the fulfillment of the commission given her by the Gods of the Acron Tree was accomplished.

Sunset was the hour for Indian gatherings; and so it came about that as the sun sank from sight in the west, the tribe was once more assembled on the fireground. As Mystica stepped forward, a great silence fell. With many gestures and wavings of her bare arms, she told of her wanderings. She whispered, as if half afraid, of a little trail that led high into the hills, and of the awful inscription carved upon the rocks. She told of her capture and escape. When she was done, all the Indians bowed down in reverence before her.

That night she and Diego walked home together. In the hammock before the tepee they sat side by

side, telling the old, old story of love, and planning the future as men and women shall do alway.

Nine loyal fighters were chosen to capture Tauquitz, and at dawn the next morning they gathered at the tepee of Chief Algooat to listen to the plans of Mystica. Diego was present by invitation, and was the only Indian thus honored.

At sunrise the little party ascended the brushy mountain at the rear of the tepee. At noon they were high up in the hills, lunching beside a stream of cool water that plashed musically down the mountain side. But only Diego and Mystica think of its music as lovers do. The others have deeper thoughts.

After some little discussion, it was decided that Mystica should go ahead and see if the ground were clear. So she stole on toward the home of the evil spirit, and the rest waited in fear and hope for her return.

Suddenly she came upon them with a little gasp of delight. "I have seen Tauquitz," she said softly, "and he lies by the side of a great jar of grape juice, drunk. Now is our time!" and she led the party over the stone wall down into the enclosure.

A pile of ghastly white bones frightened the Indians. They knelt in prayer, afraid to go forward. Only Diego was unmoved. He studied the pile of bones carefully, and soon saw that the sacrifices of Tauquitz had been of both sexes.

"Up! Up!" pleaded Mystica, and she led the way, running ahead of them all. They followed close upon her heels for a time, but soon fell behind. All at once they heard voices and halted trembling.

"Warriors—Diego!" suddenly rang out Mystica's voice in great fear.

The warriors hid behind a rock, where they could see the evil spirit.

"Oh, good and great Tauquitz," pleaded Mystica, "forgive me for betraying you; I did it only for the good of my people."

The drunken man staggered close to her. "And who are your people?" he asked, with a hideous leer. "Ah, Mystica, I know you, and though you are a Goddess you have tried to betray me into the hands of the Indians. But show me your people, and even if they have arrows ready in their bows I shall destroy them. And you, who have betrayed me, Goddess though you be, must die."

A great sorrow came over Mystica. She feared her people would never be free.

"Kill me, Tauquitz," she said simply.

For a moment Tauquitz faltered. "Am I to kill, while drunk, the maiden I once loved?" he asked, sadly. "But it must be."

He picked up the ax and came close to her side. Gripping it with both hands, he swung it back for the death blow. Mystica stood like a statue.

A sharp twang rang out suddenly, and Diego's bow had sent an arrow hissing into the thick flesh of Tauquitz's arm. The ax fell to the ground, but Tauquitz drew Mystica close to him, praying that he might yet send her soul into the darkened future.

"Oh, Diego!" she cried, as Tauquitz roughly drew her to him.

Tauquitz heard the call for help, and released the maiden. He walked slowly back into a dark corner, and waited to see what result it might have. Seeing nothing, he came forth again, prepared to deal the fatal blow. But Diego was keenly alive to the danger.

"Back, you evil spirit," he cried, "or I shall send this arrow deep into your flesh." And he drew taut the string on his bow, ready to drive the arrow.

Diego's stand so gave courage to the other warriors that they now came forth from their hiding places. They were ready to fall upon Tauquitz and slay him at once. The reign of the evil spirit was fast drawing to a close.

The sight of the drawn bows was too much for Tauquitz, and he fell to the earth. So they bound him hand and foot, and his days of evil doing were days of the past.

Diego now turned to Mystica and kissed her. "Honor," he said, "awaits you at home. Come, let us be off."

And so, happy as two children, they went down the side of the mountain. Tauquitz lay groaning at the pain in his wounded arm, and cursing at the happiness of his brother. His reign had ended as suddenly as it had begun.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TRAIL.

"Kill me, Diego; I want to die," whispered Tauquitz. "Put an arrow straight through my heart. I would a thousand times prefer death to captivity."

Lost records tell of the long journey homeward, of the arrival at the tepees of the tribe, and of many other things. Suffice it to say, they reached home after a tedious journey.

Chief Algooat was the first to hear them coming, and he ran from his tepee to greet them. He spoke to Mystica first, then to Diego, and lastly to his warriors who had accompanied them. Tauquitz closed his eyes tightly and refused to open them.

"Send for Judge Sinon," said the chief, "and we will try the evil spirit at once."

Tauquitz was planning to defend himself; he knew he could win over his father, and it seemed certain he would escape punishment. The Indians, however, thought otherwise, and were already preparing for his death.

The setting sun that evening found a vast throng

assembled for the Indian Court. Old Chief Algooat was there, muttering in song, and plainly showing his pleasure at the capture. The judge was also present, thanking the Sacred Acron Tree for the power of destroying the evil spirit.

Judge Sinon now gave orders for the trial to begin. At once Indian music on tightly drawn sheepskin instruments was heard, which slowly died out. Then, like the moaning of the wind, came the voices of those who surrounded the captor:

"Death! Give him death. He it is who poisoned our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, our sisters. Let his sentence be death."

"Bring forth the Evil Spirit," commanded Judge Sinon. "Be prompt, for a speedy trial is demanded by all. Diego, my son, you may stand here close behind me. And Chief Algooat, you will prostrate yourself before the Sacred Acron Tree and pray that my decision shall never condemn the tribe's advancement and increase."

Through all these preliminaries Tauquitz sat in silence. On every side he could see scowling faces. On every side death met his gaze. At times, even, he could hear the chant, "Die, oh, Tauquitz! die by the blaze of the fire!" Then, perhaps, the chorus would die down to a whisper, as the old judge would speak. Presently the great stone ax was brought forth, and the judge turned to the captive, who lay

bound and helpless, on the ground.

"Tauquitz," he said, "I command you to answer whatsoever I may ask, and answer it truthfully and with no delay. Disobey, and this ax shall crush through thy skull. Come closer, Mystica, and you, too, Diego.

"Tauquitz, for many moons you have been troubling the tribe with your evil deeds. You have poisoned the spring from which many brave warriors and many good maidens drank. You have scattered disease among us all, and vast numbers of the tribe have died from this cause. Here, indeed, you see whom of us are left, only a remnant of the once powerful and large tribe. Your sentence, Tauquitz, is a severe one. You must perish in the fire."

Tauquitz lay perfectly still, never moving a single muscle.

"Tauquitz," said the judge, "why do you remain unmoved? Have you nothing to say?"

At last the captive moistened his lips and spoke. "My story is a long one, Judge Sinon, and one in which there is much sorrow."

The judge motioned him to go on.

"I thank you," said the captive, "for had you not allowed me to speak, great grief would have come to Mystica and Diego."

Diego leaped forward. "Lie, if you will," he shouted, "but if you dare bring in the name of

Mystica Algooat, I shall pray to my father to condemn you."

But the judge waved him back.

"I am here," began Tauquitz, "not bound and held by the power of the Indian, but by the betraying hand of a fair maiden. Believe me or not, but I tell you that this very moment my hands would be free, the sheep that are to die with me would be held for future feasting, and the cries of 'Die!' would be instead 'Long live the rescuer of the chief's daughter!' were it not for her. For once, Judge Sinon, this maiden was at my mercy.

"Less than half a moon ago I found her high in the mountains, lost. I drove the wild animals from her, that in a few more minutes would have been feasting on her flesh. Yes, I found her weeping, unguarded and afraid. I fed her upon the grapes I had gathered in the valley and upon the meat of the sheep. Long ago, Judge, I told her a secret; I told her of my secret home. And she betrayed me.

"If you condemn me, Judge Sinon, I shall wander in spirit among yonder mountains, groaning and crying for vengeance. You may burn my body, but death only brings me before the spirits. If you but listen, and your ears be keen, you can this very moment hear the spirits groan off yonder in the mountains. As true as you have the power to condemn the flesh, yonder spirit has the power to condemn you

after death. Do you not believe me, oh great and mighty Judge?"

But Judge Sinon slowly shook his head. "If you have such power," he said, "why not break the thongs that bind you hand and foot? If you can make the mountains groan and crumble, why not escape?"

"You do not believe what I say?"

"No, Tauquitz, I do not."

"Then I shall no longer deny my birthright. Judge, would you condemn your own son?"

"Who are you?" asked the old man, starting to his feet.

"I am your son, Silveric Sinon, who months ago fled to the mountains to escape the wrath of Chief Algooat. See, here is a wound you must know. Do you remember the day I drove back the Indians who were born out of the rocks in a single day? Can you forget your words, 'Oh, Silveric Sinon, my son, you have saved your father in his old age?' "

"He lies," said Diego.

"Axman," commanded Judge Sinon, "search the captive and see if upon his right side you find arrow marks."

"Yes," spoke up a guardsman, "prove the words he speaks are false."

But the search only proved the truth. The old judge recalled how a little before he had prayed that

nothing should influence him to save the evil spirit, and now——

"In what battle," he asked sternly, "did you receive that wound?"

"Ah, father, you remember it as well as I. Our chief was killed, defeat was upon us, and all seemed utterly lost, when a brave warrior saved the day. And that warrior, Judge Sinon, was—who?"

"Yes, it was you," said the old man, with tears in his eyes. "But tell me, why did you flee to the mountains?"

"To escape the wrath of Chief Algooat, who cried aloud for my life."

"Enough," said the judge. "Axman, take away Silveric. Why have you brought my own son, that I should pronounce him guilty? I command you, take him away."

Already the Indians were clamoring for a decision. The judge was silent. Even when Chief Algooat questioned him he only shook his head sadly. Again and again they begged for his decision, and as often he shook his head. At last, he said slowly:

"Never again shall the spirits of good judgment visit this tribe, and for all time shall the Indian be unwise and forsaken by the Acron Gods. Diego shall lose his sheep and Mystica her beauty."

"What mean you?" questioned the chief.

But the judge only shook his head

A little way off an Indian shouted, "Burn him!" And another and yet another took up the cry till the whole air rang with the slogan.

"He must be burned," they shouted. "He must burn even if the judge does not command it."

Chief Algooat turned to the judge. "You see their thirst for vengeance," he said simply. "What shall I say to them."

"Tell them to wait till the morrow for the decision," begged Judge Sinon. "Tell them to wait till the morrow."

So Chief Algooat spoke to the Indians, bidding them await another day before carrying out the sentence. After he had done speaking to them, he turned to the judge.

"Go to your tepee," he said, "and pray through the night, that you may have strength upon the morrow, should your son be proved guilty of poisoning the spring. Thy decision must be for justice and honor."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DECISION.

Evening came once more, a calm evening in midsummer, its silence unbroken by the fire dance or the thrilling cry of the Indian guardsman. All the night Mystica dreamed of the wrong she had done, and of the lover she had lost. All that night Diego sighed and prayed for her. All that night Judge Sinon tossed about, fearful of the morrow.

Long before the coyotes upon the mesa had ceased their barking, an erect figure stole silently along. It was Mystica searching for her father.

"I shall ask council with him," she told herself, "and perhaps he will plead for the freedom of Silveric." She came to his tepee again, and softly called to him. "I, thy daughter, Mystica, have come to ask thee to free Silveric. The Acron Gods whisper to me that I am to carry a message that will free him. I shall go to the judge and say, 'Silveric shall be freed.' "

"If the Gods have whispered this to you," answered the chief, "it must be done. The power to

live among us I cannot grant him, for all the night it has been running in my brain that he did poison the spring; but as for freedom, that is quite another thing. Were he to go back to the mountains, no harm could come to us."

"That is all I ask, father, and you will grant it, will you not?"

"Go to the judge and tell him that he may order Silveric back to his home in the mountains, to be watched over by five guardsmen."

At the entrance to the judge's tepee, she paused, half afraid.

Diego's hounds threatened her, but she only laughed at them.

Then, very low and soft, she began the message, standing just outside the tepee. So low did she speak that the judge did not hear her at all; only one who had been lying awake, waiting for the voice.

In another minute Diego was out of the tepee and held her hand tightly in his.

"And you still love me, Diego?" she asked, wonderingly.

"I do," said Diego softly.

"But come, I have good news to bear to your father. Let us go to him at once."

And there, standing near the old man, she told him the glad tidings. "My good Judge," she said, leaning close to his ear, "my father sends me on

this dark night to tell you that on the morrow you may command Silveric to go back to his mountain home, there to be guarded by five Indians. Freedom and not death is his sentence."

"And father," interrupted Diego, "before the next setting sun I shall begin to build a tepee for Mystica and me."

"For Mystica?" said the judge.

And Diego repeated the words softly, "For Mystica."

So the judge blessed the two, and gladly forgave Mystica for aiding in the capture of Silveric. Good-byes were said, and the three were soon separated once more, each waiting for the morning to come.

Day broke presently, and the Indians began to bestir themselves, still hopeful of the fire and feast. Early they gathered on the fireground, Indians of all the tepees, the chief, the judge, and the daughter and son who were to unite the two families. Silveric Sinon, still bound, was led forth by the guardsmen, to be greeted by the cry of "Death!" once more.

The judge rose to greet the assembled tribe, and a great silence fell over the Indians. Like eagles, the eyes of many were fixed on the prey, gloating at their capture. As the judge began to speak, the cry of "Tauquitz must die!" rang out.

Judge Sinon began to plead with the assembled people to allow Mystica Algooat and Diego to settle

the punishment of the captive. His sentences were short and abrupt, but each carried force and influence. To the captors, he urged, rightfully belonged the disposition of the man before them.

Here Diego threw himself before the people and begged that they spare his brother and allow him to go back to the mountains. When he had ended he fell fainting to the ground.

All about was silence. Quickly taking advantage of this momentary stupor, Judge Sinon appointed five trusty Indians to take the captive back to his home in the mountains. Chief Algooat silently fitted an arrow in his bow and sent it whizzing toward the granite hill. "The decision," he said, "is fair; let my tribesmen appointed for the task follow the arrow far up into the mountains. Do as our judge requests, and peace, happiness and plenty shall be with us always."

Low murmurings were now heard, but Chief Algooat quickly silenced them. With a last blessing upon his father and a promise to watch over the spirits of the Indians as one by one they passed away, Silveric followed the five guardsmen.

Family by family, Indian by Indian, the assembled group melted away, leaving the blazing fire to die out for want of the sacrifice that had been planned.

Because Mystica's captor had escaped death, she

was forbidden by Indian custom to marry any other. There was nothing to do but wait patiently for the inevitable.

A great storm arose one day, with terrible flashes of lightning and rumbling peals of thunder. Through the tumult it seemed to Mystica she could hear Silveric's voice calling to her that all would be well. Greatly disturbed, she listened for any other sound, but no word came to her ear.

At noonday a messenger came panting into camp.

"Where is thy father?" he demanded excitedly. "I have a dreadful story for his ears."

"Here," gasped the old chief, just within the tepee. "What is it?"

Then the messenger, with many dramatic gestures, told of a powerful storm that Silveric had caused to come upon the mountains; told how the whole mountain side had crumbled and given away under the weight of ice and snow high up among the peaks. The five guardsmen and Silveric had perished together.

A few days later Diego Sinon, second son of the judge, and Mystica Algooat, Goddess of the Sunset, were united in marriage.

And so the legend closes. To this day the Indians believe that Tauquitz rules the mountains; and a peak is even named in his honor. When the moun-

tains roar with the rumble of thunder, it is thought that Tauquitz is once more torturing the five guardsmen.

These Indians will soon be forgotten, though, like the Mound Builders, their work shall live after them. The author prays that each true Californian may remember that through all their trials they strove constantly for liberty, peace and happiness.

An hundred years and more have passed, and this tribe of Indians has prospered. Today they call themselves the Sabola Valley Indians; and what could be more appropriate, when it is known that "Sabola" signifies "restful," and the whole idea conveyed is that of Indians at rest.

Introduction to Part II.

California should be a proud state. Within her boundaries is a vast area of fertile land. Her rivers are picturesque streams emptying into the Pacific; her lakes lie still and beautiful; her mountain ranges tower high in grand and stately peaks; her valleys are the garden spots of the earth. The land is rich with milk and honey.

It is no wonder, then, that California is the state of the tourist. Far to the west the sands of a beach attract; far to the east the sand is that of a desert. It is not alone the rose that appeals to the traveler; other charms have equal powers.

Comfort and strength also lie within her boundaries. She is a healing physician, and for the tired man there is rest and vigor in her winters.

Not only has California her Lake Tahoe, her Yosemite Valley, her Santa Catalina Islands, her Shasta Summits, but she has wonders of every kind; she has mysteries. And it is of one of the latter that the author would write.

Like a child on its mother's bosom, Tauquitz, or Devil's Peak, rests against the Jacinto Range of mountains. Although not of startling height, there is something about it that merits admiration, that makes one feel its friendliness, its stateliness, its grandeur. When one speaks to it there comes from far down in the heart of the peak a rumbling that can be described only as a sound like the stamping of many cattle. It seems to fairly throb with life.

Part Two.

CHAPTER VIII.

SUMMER TIME IN CALIFORNIA.

As the summer wore on, the number of people who flocked from our cities to our mountain resort increased daily. Every excursion now brought multitudes.

It was the last excursion in July to which I had been looking forward. Early in the afternoon of that day I sat in the railroad waiting room, watching the clock and reading a time-table. It still lacked fifteen minutes of train time.

All at once I caught myself saying, "Surely, Miss Phillips, you will not disappoint me." And then, as I recalled where I was, I said to myself much lower, "She will not be apt to do so." I took out her letter and looked at the reassuring marginal note: "Meet me at the San Jacinto depot, on the 31st." I put the letter back in my pocket and glanced at the clock. The time was up.

I went out on the platform and looked up the track expectantly. An express messenger told me

the train was past due, but just as he spoke the words I heard a whistle in the south. In another minute the panting engine, with its five coaches, was before me.

Not content to wait for a sight of her till she came out on the car platform, I hastily pushed through the crowd into the train. She was not in the first coach, nor in the second; I was beginning to fear she had disappointed me, after all. In the third and fourth I saw nobody I knew, and it was with some misgivings that I went into the last.

Then I saw her. She was beckoning to me and smiling in welcome. It took only a moment to reach her side, but I faltered like a school boy when I tried to greet her.

I found she was not alone. Miss Gertrude Wells, with her father and mother, had accompanied her. I knew them all very well, having met them during a sojourn in San Francisco some little time before.

After we had exchanged greetings, we were driven to the city, and a little later were at dinner together. Mr. Wells was a jolly old gentleman and already he was telling us of the plans he had laid and of the adventures he should meet.

Darkness fell early in the valley, and the two young ladies and I soon withdrew to a quiet corner of the great veranda, where we passed a most pleasant evening. We talked and laughed and joked as only

young people can, and the time to say goodnight came all too soon. The plans of the young ladies were already laid. They had come to San Jacinto with the idea of taking an outing in the mountains. An invitation to join them was given me, and when I left them that night it was understood that I was to join them in the mountains two days later.

As I walked home that night, the picture of Gertrude Wells persisted in coming before me. I knew she was attractive, even handsome; there was about her, too, a fascination difficult to explain. Altogether, she was a girl any man would admire.

Yet I could not forget Miss Phillips; I could not forget the evenings I had passed in her company, nor the triumph that came to me the day I won her. I must be true to her under all circumstances.

Another matter was troubling me. Could I leave my vast farming interests for a vacation in the mountains? And this, too, in the busiest part of the year?

But what is business when there is a keen pleasure to offset it? Not for all the farms in the world would I forego the pleasure of that trip to the mountains.

CHAPTER IX.

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT.

All that night Tauquitz Peak rumbled and roared. I slept very little and awoke after a brief nap at daylight to find my head ringing with the persistent noise of the mountain and my hair well tousled. I lay back on my pillow, after ascertaining that everything in the room was as I had left it the night before, and recalled the events of the preceding evening. It was all indistinct and blurred; my head pained me with its terrible throbbing. A voice from somewhere seemed to say, "A few months of this sleeplessness and thou shalt return to dust." I tried to reason it out, and I said angrily, out loud, "No, this rumbling of a mysterious mountain shall not rob me of my sleep."

As I lay there thinking, the clock struck sharply. Seven o'clock! Impossible! With a single move I was upon my feet before the timepiece. There, sure enough, was the hand pointing to the V and its two I guards. I turned to the mirror, and saw further proof of my sleeplessness in my bloodshot eyes.

All that morning, as I went about my chores, the thought of the mysteries of Tauquitz Peak troubled me. All day it was in my thoughts. I determined to go to bed early that night, and endeavor to obtain some sleep, if possible. I had just started for my room with this purpose in my mind, when somebody called to me.

"William!" The voice had a familiar ring, yet I could not place it.

I turned to look at the speaker. Two pack burros stood regarding me with mild wonder, while a man astride a third grinned pleasantly.

"Have you forgotten me?" he asked.

Then it came to me. "You are Benjamin Phillips, Attorney-at-Law, of San Francisco, aren't you!" I asked.

"You knew I was all the time," he said.

I tried to apologize. "It seems strange to think of you driving burros for a living."

"Well, you see, it is this way," he began. "I had to give up the study of law, as it proved too confining. My health has not been good of late and Dr. Johnson, whom I presume you remember, advised me to come to Southern California."

"For a long stay?" I asked.

"Well, nothing definite, unless you count the time until I regain my usual sturdiness, definite."

I said nothing, waiting for him to explain further.

"Hasn't my sister, Porta, told you? Didn't you meet her at the train?" He asked the question in a surprised voice.

"Yes," I answered, "I did meet her at the train last night, but she said nothing to me about you becoming a burro expert. In fact, she did not mention that you were on this side of San Francisco at all."

"Oh, well," he laughed, "it will be a good surprise anyhow. You see I ran across a bargain in these animals while waiting for my train at Riverside. A miner offered me the three, with his equipment, for fifty dollars, and I took him up. Now that I am here, I intend to enjoy myself with you and the girls in the mountains. I told Porta about it, but she said to allow you to be surprised, as she was sure she could depend on you, rain or shine."

I looked pleased.

"Did you ever try to persuade one of these burros to do what you wished it to?" asked Benjamin, abruptly changing the topic of conversation to what most interested him.

"Many times," I said sadly.

"Well, I had my first experience the other day." And then he squatted down by the roadside and told me of the obstinate brute he had tried to conquer. I sympathized with him when he said it was as useless

to persuade a burro that the road was to follow as it was to convince a murderer that he was an emblem of purity.

"I suppose, Benjamin," I said presently, "that you have no objection to remaining with me to-night?"

"None in the least," he answered heartily. "In fact, I was looking for a camping place when I was directed to you."

By the time Benjamin was in the house, with the daily paper in his hands, it was past time for old Tauquitz Peak to rumble. Yet I fancied I could hear it, ever growing louder and louder. I thought at first that it was merely imagination, yet it troubled me. Thoughts of the coming vacation with the girls alternated with forebodings as to the Peak. Thinking thus deeply, I soon forgot all about my visitor.

Presently the supper was ready. "Benjamin," I called.

No answer.

"Benjamin," I repeated, "supper is ready."

Still he did not respond. Thinking him about to end some story he was reading, I hesitated, waiting one minute, two, many. Alarmed at the silence, I went into the room. It was empty.

Where had my visitor gone? Had I been duped by some clever swindler into thinking I was entertaining a friend? This thought came to my mind

almost instantly, and I ran to the barn. The burros were still there. So back to the house I went, and began to search for him.

All at once an idea came to me. I ran to the cellar door, threw it wide open and called to him. There, behind a cask in the foremost corner, I found him cowed and trembling.

"Don't let me trouble you," I said jokingly, "but what in thunder are you doing down here? That noise is not wind—"

"Then we are not having a cyclone?" he asked.

"Far from it," I replied. "Come upstairs, and I will tell you about it."

So we climbed the stairs. He had always lived in a middle state where high winds were frequent and dangerous, and hearing the rumbling had run for shelter with the idea that a cyclone was about to pass over us.

A little later, seated at the table, I told him of the rumblings of Tauquitz. Its mysteries, I explained, dealt with an old Indian legend. To me, I said, there was something awful in the unknown disturbance deep in the bosom of the granite Peak. For a whole year it had teased me; it had moaned through long nights; it had sighed through long days.

Benjamin stopped me with a little gesture. "If your honor pleases, I will dismiss the case and go back to town." And he was in earnest, for without

waiting even to apologize he had his hat in hand and was swearing that he would stay in no haunted land. To this day I can see him standing there in the open door, looking fearfully to the east, where Tauquitz Peak rumbled on.

Finally he turned to me. "How long has it been that way?"

"Since long before the Spanish inhabited the valley. The Indians will tell you that it has rumbled since the Acron Gods created the world."

We fell to talking of other things, but his mind was pre-occupied. After a time he asked if I had a San Francisco daily paper, as he wished to look up a trial of an enemy of his, who was then being tried at the capital. I found a paper for him, and he sat down to study it.

"Look here," he said suddenly; "how dare you tell me Tauquitz is not a living peak." He thrust the paper before me and read aloud: "'Tauquitz Alive. Volcanic Masses Seen Dripping from Its Crest. Columns of Smoke Curling High in the Air.'"

For a moment I said nothing. He loooked up at me to see what I might suggest; then he went on with the article, emphasizing every strong point. Finally, for want of something better to say, I told him California would yet be proud of this mountain. Benjamin angrily pooh-hoohed the idea. I now denied the report. It was false, I said; just a newspaper

yarn. Some forest fires lighted by careless tourists, had spread beyond their control and had deceived the writer of the article. But all the time I was searching the other papers for some contradictory report.

So with talk and reading the evening wore on. Bedtime came, and Benjamin asked to be shown to his room. "Should I arouse the whole house before morning," he said, "do not be surprised."

For a full half hour I sat awaiting developments. But no sound save the steady rumbling of old Tauquitz Peak broke the silence.

The next morning I found Benjamin looking pale and worried. When I asked him how he felt, he said he had half a mind to leave the place at once.

"And why, pray?" I asked.

"Because," he answered soberly, "I had a vision last night." I tried to laugh and joke about the matter, but he did not respond. So I settled down and asked him to tell me all about it.

"Just before morning," he began, "I had a vision of a train of burros, with our party near them. We were plodding along through brush and among boulders that made the way well nigh impassible."

"Were we lost?" I asked.

"No, not so bad as that; and perhaps, after all it was only a foretaste of the good times we are to have among the mountains. Come, lock up your house, or turn the neighbors' children loose in it,

and let us be off to the mountains this very day. We will leave at one this afternoon."

I thought of what lay before us, and I am free to confess I forgot everything. Still I had the good sense to engage Mac, a close neighbor, to look after the harvest, and at one o'clock that day we were off for the hills, away from worry, on to happy abandon of worldly cares.

We came to the toll-gate presently, a curious structure guarded by an old Mexican. We learned that he had collected toll here for thirty years, and we paid him the "passo" (one dollar) demanded and passed through. Evening found us well on our way, in the Strawberry Valley, high up in the mountains.

At the Del Strawberry Hotel we turned over our burros to the hotel keeper and started for the wash room to clean up. As we entered the hotel, the girls hailed us, with many comments on our dirty faces. Benjamin admitted that we were a trifle shaded, and I am sure we must have been. The long ride we had taken was anything but clean.

We soon fell to discussing the promise of an early trip back into the mountains. In the midst of the conversatian Gertrude suddenly held up her hand.

"Hear that," she said.

"What?" asked Benjamin, paling a little.

"The rumbling of the mountains."

We listened a moment in silence. Clear and

distinct it came to us, a smothered rumble like the stampeding of a great herd of cattle or the wild flight of a bunch of horses.

"Do you know," said Mr. Wells, "I have convinced myself that the Indians had good cause for believing that the spirits ruled that mountain peak. But let's go in to supper now."

After the meal we gathered in a little group on the wide veranda. A bright campfire lighted up the oaks and pines near the building. And there with all laughing and joking, I told them of Benjamin's experience of the day before, when he had thought a cyclone was near at hand. All laughed heartily, and we went to our various rooms with smiles on our faces.

We were up with the chattering jay birds the next morning. From a burro renter we obtained five additional burros, making eight altogether. Proud of our well equipped outfit, we drove them down in front of the hotel veranda, which was filled with those who were waiting for breakfast. The animals brayed continuously, and we attracted no little notice. The fact that they were so small and that we were loading them so heavily seemed to attract as much attention as the noise. For it really is wonderful what strength the little beasts have. They may be loaded until they are literally covered and still they plod on, never in the least minding their burden.

A good majority of the people on the veranda had kodaks and cameras, and those who had none scampered off to their rooms to secure them. I dare say we presented an odd and picturesque sight. One old lady came close and pleaded with us not to load the burros too heavily. "Please don't break his back," she said, as the burro packer placed another bundle on the back of one of the animals. The man sniffed contemptuously and went on with his work in gleeful haste.

"You darling little things," she said presently. "May God have mercy on your cruel master." Then, unable to stand the sight, she rushed around the hotel in search of her husband.

It tickled Benjamin immensely. "Hear that," he laughed. " 'Oh, the darling little things!' Why, the stubborn brutes wouldn't budge an inch for such a woman."

The woman came back, accompanied by her husband. "Don't put another thing on that burro's back," she said; "if you do, I shall have you arrested for cruelty to animals."

"The president of some humane society, I suppose," snorted the packer. "Well, there ain't no humane society that can show me points about packing a burro." And he went on with his work with stolid indifference.

He used an hundred feet of one-eighth inch rope,

wrapping down under the burro and then up over the load, and so on until the burro looked a good deal like a giant torpedo.

Click, click, and the kodaks had taken a fair shot of a party with its outfit ready for a ten days' outing in the mountains.

"Got in its ear, Harold?" asked a lady of her husband who was trying to focus a 2½x2½ lens upon the burro. Then the second burro being put through the same process of packing as the first, and we were off.

Click! click! even to this day I can hear the click of an hundred kodaks as we were leaving the Del Strawberry Hotel for the ascension of Tauquitz Peak.

The two miles across Strawberry Valley was a trip that I often think about. Through pastures green and ablaze with many beautiful mountain flowers, under the shade of giant pine, oak and fir trees, over babbling brooks into whose transparent waters the eyes glimpse darting mountain trout,—ah! a paradise, is what the lover of nature would call it.

Our burro train made good progress, and we were soon at the foot of a little trail which wound its way up the steep side of Tauquitz.

"I'd give forty-one cents and a cup of hot coffee," said Benjamin, "if the squeaky voiced lady

was here, just to see her dumpling little dears wiggle up the steep trail."

A short rest and the start up was made, I keeping well to the rear. Trusting a burro to follow I knew was not good law, and so fell back to that position.

Only a little way up the steep trail had I ridden before it became necessary to dismount. The burros were traveling so slow that to bring a quickening inspiration to them I toiled on foot, swinging a great oak club. Suspicious because of my dismounting, first Porta, then Gertrude, and presently Mr. and Mrs. Wells also dismounted.

"Give up the case if you want to. I shall appeal to the higher courts and ride this burro to the top, or down the side of this mountain to the bottom," called Benjamin.

"The timid girls are afraid they will be tipped overboard," I said.

"Benjamin is afraid, himself," answered Gertrude, arousing a like opinion from the rest of the party. So we trudged on, and up the steep mountain trail.

"I'm exhausted," despairingly gasped Mrs. Wells, first to acknowledge it.

"I'm very tired, myself," remarked her husband.

"Miles to the summit," gasped Gertrude, pointing with her cane far up the mountain side.

The condition was general, for not one of the party was hardened to mountain climbing. "Mount the burros and ride again," was the universal resolution, which was immediately adopted and unanimously carried out.

While resting on a spur higher up we were assailed by a princely bloodhound. At first it seemed evident that he must be shot, so as to run no chances of his attacking one of our party. Rapidly he drew nearer and somehow within my heart I felt that I knew the noble dog. "Brave Trailer!" I coolly said; "Brave Trailer!"

The hound at my second address stopped short, snuffing all about him. "Brave Trailer," I repeated, now feeling certain.

Indifferent to my friendly welcome, he coolly jogged up to me, sniffing of my person. "You noble fellow," I said, laying a hand upon his head; and then who but Brave Trailer, No. 345, Riverside Co., and owned by Capt. Sheriff Johnson, should spring toward my face that he might kiss me.

"Do you see any signs of men having lately been over the trail?" I asked Benjamin.

"Fresh signs and from all appearances made since the showers of yesterday," he replied.

"Then I must let Brave Trailer go, that he may continue in his official capacity. Shall I?" I asked Porta, just ahead of me.

"Let the noble fellow go! why no," she replied.

"Keep him for company," joined in Gertrude.

"Well, it is a sin to coax him from performing his duty, but then we may need just his kind of assistance in watching against these same fellows; so here's to luck for Riverside County!" and I soon had a strong picket rope about Brave Trailer's neck.

It was nearly noon before we reached the summit. Before us and receding eastwardly was the Tauquitz Valley, watered by many little brooklets, green from many varieties of grasses and shrubs, lavished with beautiful mountain flowers, and shaded by pines and fir trees. A second paradise, as Mrs. Wells called it. It was surely a lovely spot, and truly homelike, for cattle in great numbers were eagerly feeding upon the summer's growth.

With hurrahs that re-echoed through the mountain, we announced our arrival at a deserted log cabin supposed to have been the residence of the noted "Jack Meeks."

After unloading our burros and picketing them within reach of water and grass, we made ourselves ready for dinner. After the meal, Mrs. Wells proposed that the little party set out to inspect the mysteries of Tauquitz Peak. A half hour of steady climbing over rocky surfaces and through brushy patches brought us to the highest point. Here we were surprised to find that by looking westward we

could see far over the Strawberry Valley and even catch a glimpse of San Jacinto, back in the mountains.

"It resembles a painting," remarked Mrs. Wells; "a glittering basin fringed with a narrow border of green trees, and a wider one with shady foothills."

Far toward the western horizon the sun was reflecting its brightness upon the Pacific, making a splendid view. It may have been a freak of the imagination, but we could see the breaking waters as they dashed themselves in a spray against the Pacific shore, one hundred miles away. To the south, we caught the beauty of a bird's-eye view of a mountain chain, peak after peak, foothill after foothill.

To the east stretched the wastes of the Colorado Desert, gradually receding from the base of Tauquitz Peak, until the eye failed to trace the line where the sky and the desert met.

But the scenery was forgotten as we looked deep into the crater of the Tauquitz Peak. It was a deep cavity in the top of the peak, with rough and ragged edges. It was surely dangerous. One would not descend into it for fear of being unable to climb out again.

After two hours of sightseeing we walked leisurely toward home. We passed through dense thickets of manzanita, and under overhanging pine boughs with the towering fir on one side, and gigan-

tic emblem of loneliness, the cedar, on the other. It was not yet dark, and the pine-crows were singing, almost making one believe that even the tree boughs blended with their voices to make the sweet music. It was truly "a paradise del California," as Porta said, and we gave three loud cheers for the beauties about us.

Night soon closed in upon us; the gray peaks grew shadowy, and where the thickets and over-hanging tree-boughs swept the earth the darkness was still more dense.

The dawn brought with it sore disappointment. Instead of a bright, clear morning all was shadowy and gloomy, clouds having gathered about during the night. "But a fleecy cloud coating," said Benjamin hopefully. We argued through breakfast about the weather, and after packing our two burros left the sheltering cabin.

Benjamin and I were thinking of his dream. And so, true to our plans he led the way, taking our little party down and down, as he guided himself by a cow path zigzagging its way toward the desert.

"I am reminded of one prominent point in the Alps," remarked Mrs. Wells, as we all came to an abrupt stop upon a shelf-like ledge. "See," and she called our attention to a gorgeous canyon far below. It truly was magnificent, yea, inspiring; for here was a perfect blending of color and form.

Unexpectedly, Mr. Wells, who had said very little all morning, questioned our whereabouts.

"Don't you think we shall get lost?" questioned Porta.

"You little coward," scolded Benjamin, "anyone can follow this trail."

"Boys, I dislike this part of the mountain," said Mrs. Wells, taking part with the other complaining ones.

"State the case, Mrs. Wells," commanded Benjamin, as though he were in court examining a witness.

"Well, for one thing it looks much as though we were near the haunts of criminals."

"Nonsense! Mrs. Wells, this is almost as lively as Market Street in San Francisco."

"Yes, sixty years before the war of 1812," replied Mrs. Wells, not to be outdone in the matter.

Tired and lame from the day's riding, our party decided to camp in a little garden spot just before us. Here under the canopy of a solitary oak, we pitched the two tents. We surely had many things to be thankful for. A storm raging all the afternoon on the desert, had not risen to our height at all. But by night things were taking a decided change for the worse. The distant storm was showing signs of rising with the oncoming darkness.

"I wish Mr. Wells would be a little funny,"

said Benjamin to me, while we were testing the strength of the guy-ropes. I know that if we could just get him started—" But here Mrs. Wells interrupted by asking if we should not do something to thwart the fury of the storm. "Hold the tents over you, and I guess all will come out right," replied Benjamin, jokingly. But Mrs. Wells was not in a joking mood, and turned away disgusted. Another moment and a flash of lightning brightened the heavens, causing Mrs. Wells to scream and dodge into the tent.

"I'll stir the girls," said Benjamin, and he called Porta and Gertrude from under their canvas shelter. "See the heavens, girls, how they roll as yeasty waves upon the sea!" But no sooner were the words uttered than the whole mountain side was lurid with a flash of lightning. Closely following the flash came the heavy roar of thunder.

A little way down the slope the eight burros were bunched, much as a swarm of bees on the honeycomb. "Catch their expression?" asked Benjamin, pointing down toward them. They stood with ears straightened before them, closely fortified, which has given rise to the expression, "What destroys one destroy all."

A light mist began to fall, driving Porta and Gertrude back under their canvas shelter. Trailer, who was faithfully watching us brace the tents, gave

a sniff at the damp, chilly wind, barked dolefully, and scampered into the tent.

"There'll be little pleasure for us until this storm is over," I remarked, my voice unusually serious.

"I am not very sorry for you and me," Benjamin returned, "for we deserve it, but I must acknowledge that it is a sin to have the girls and Mr. and Mrs. Wells out in this kind of a storm."

The storm came even earlier than we had expected, driving Benjamin and me under shelter. For an hour we lay in our tent; then I went out to see how the others were fareing.

With one ear against the cold, wet canvas of the other tent I paused to listen. To my discomfort I heard someone sighing, "Why did the boys bring us away from the cabin?" and the consoling voice of Mr. Wells, "We shall all be out of here tomorrow." Without making my little visit known I stole quickly back to tell Benjamin. He, to my great surprise, grew instantly angry. "I presume it is sister Porta; she is all the time trying to cry herself out of trouble. Well, we are in for it, and so far as I can see there is only thing left for us to do,—to get up some excitement, anything to drive away worry."

'Good!" I answered, promising to study out something by the time the shower ceased.

It was fully an hour after this before the shower ended, giving way to a light snow. The clouds broke

somewhat, affording us a dim ray of moonlight. Barely able to keep silent, Benjamin and I and Trailer sallied forth. Bringing from our store room, which we had under a ledge of granite, one of the oak-wood box pack saddles, and tossing it lightly upon the tent of the four in our party, we sicked Brave Trailer upon it. To my surprise, in a single leap the dog was squarely upon the tent, growling and floundering furiously.

"Oh! oh! Mr. Wells, shoot it," screamed his wife. "Shoot it!"

In another instant we had pulled Trailer away, fearing that he might be shot by excited Mr. Wells. We were greatly frightened, for as I remember the incident we stole back to our tents in haste. The joke had taken a more serious tone than we had expected was possible.

"Bang! bang!" rang out two shots; and we knew Mr. Wells had mustered sufficient courage to offer defence against the attacking beast. The smoke must have been suffocating in the tent as coughing grew furious. We heard one of the girls in an undertone plead with Mr. Wells to go out and see what had become of the boys.

When the excitement had somewhat abated, we hastened into the tent to joke about the serious fun.

It may as well be acknowledged here that we received a cold welcome. We sought to interpret

the joke as a means of cheer instead of fright. As I remember, Porta told me I hadn't cheered her a bit.

"Good-night! may you girls dream of lions, and Mr. Wells of pack saddles," was Benjamin's parting thrust. I listened for a "good-night" in reply, but none came. I, at least, went to my tent with a guilty conscience. I had surely bruised my own heart, and I was man enough to know I was wholly to blame.

CHAPTER XI.

IN A SUMMER STORM.

A second and much heavier shower was soon beating down upon our tents. All about us ran little streams of water, showing the rainfall to have been very heavy higher up the mountain. We watched these little streams curiously. They would swell and ebb, then overflow, covering almost the entire mountain side. We saw we had tented in a direct path for a great volume of the waste water, and on account of this we were obliged to place a heavy embankment against the upper side of the tents.

Tired and weary, and half drenched by the rain, we at last entered our tent, to get a little sleep. I had been in dreamland for perhaps a half-hour when Benjamin woke me. Before I could complain he had whispered into my ear, "William, the waste water has found access to our tent."

"What?" I asked drowsily.

"I'm floating like a log on a mill pond," he replied coolly.

"Then go out and stop the flow," I snapped, turning to resume my napping.

"Did you sleep high and dry last night, Mr. Ben-

jamin?" asked Gertrude, her face aglow with smiles.

"Yes, slept like a fish in a river," Benjamin smiled. The mystery was soon out, for Porta had burst into laughing. "Someone of you girls," said Benjamin, positively, "broke the bank against our tent."

"Not I," said Porta.

"Nor I," added Gertrude.

This surprised Benjamin so much that he stood for a moment in deep study.

"How about it being Mr. Wells?" I suggested. But Benjamin only laughed.

We had risen early. It had evidently snowed heavily all the latter part of the night, for at least two or three feet covered the ground. Everything was so greatly changed that we felt ourselves strangers in a strange land.

The snow continued to fall at intervals all the forenoon, with no promise of stopping. We feared a snowslide and transferred our tents higher up the mountain to the shelter of a granite ledge. Early in the afternoon a bitter cold wind blew from the north, turning the snow into ice.

Porta Phillips predicted a snowslide, and her prediction came true. Less than half a mile to our right the very top, as it seemed, of a small sub-peak slid off its base, skidding down the mountain side with great speed, and producing a terrible crash.

"See! see!" exclaimed Gertrude, as large granite bodies fell close in the wake of the first sliding mass. In another second there came echo and re-echo, telling us that the mass had found its level in a deep canyon far below.

"It's done with, thank God!" said Mrs. Wells, soberly.

A half-hour passed quietly. It grew colder all the time. A second slide, considerably smaller than the first, soon started, and raced with great speed down and down, until we saw it plunge into a deep canyon fully a mile below. The frequency of these sliding masses aroused us to the need of carefully examining our protection against them, and Benjamin and Mr. Wells and I ventured out into the snow. It was lucky we made this inspection; for we soon found that the ledge above our tents was little better than pinioned upon a crumbly granite base.

Without a moment's hesitation we hurried below, told our story, and were soon moving tents and stores to a more substantial shelter farther to the right. When Porta objected that this place was still nearer to where the first slide started, Benjamin laughed. "A golden rule you must learn, sis," he said: "The better you treat your enemy the better you are treated by him."

Night was fast closing down upon us. The fading of daylight seemed to increase the dangers. "A

fearful sight," I whispered into Benjamin's ear, realizing that we were in constant danger of being buried beneath the snow. "A night to be feared," he soberly replied, walking nervously out into the open that he might get a better view of the sky. "The clouds are becoming almost black," he said; and I heard him mutter, "dreaded sleet!"

As we feared, about nine o'clock the storm began. The sleet continued to fall for two hours, when all grew still and cold. With this great calm, save a light blowing north wind, the evening slowly stole into the midnight hours. A little later things went decidedly against us; for a heavy rain came up behind a brisk north wind.

How the hours of that dreadful morning passed I shrink from remembering. I am punished when I harbor them in my mind. A moment seemed a minute, a minute an hour, and a few hours many weeks.

It was five o'clock, if I remember, before Benjamin and I had the courage to venture from under the ledge that we might survey the stormy sky.

We found a blissful moon shining through an opening in the clouds. This gave us hope. The clouds, as we for a moment watched them, all seemed to be hastening northward. At times they raced along in a solid mass, then in broken waves. A brisk south wind we knew must be blowing higher up, or else the clouds would not be scurrying away.

Grasping an opportune time I left Benjamin and the shelter to locate the eight burros. I could not find them. Startled by their absence, I ran back to give an alarm. As I ran, my hearing faculties instantly left me, and I realized in that moment that I was stricken deaf. For only a moment I paused to listen. All was strange and silent: still I knew the wind whistled all about me, for it beat against my face. I ran a few steps and again stopped. Then and there I wanted to find the reason for the numbness of my ears. I could not tell, and, puzzled, I again started, running as fast as I could through the snow. Another time I stopped, this time feeling the ground trembling under my feet. A slide was skidding down the mountain somewhere close at hand.

I ran once more for the sheltering ledge, at last reaching it and throwing myself against the tent. Once under the shelter, my hearing faculties apparently relaxed, for a grinding crashing sound seemed to gather volume as I lay where I had fallen. I raised myself in the moment's excitement and looked back. The moon was still lighting up the mountain side. The slide, as I thought of it, had struck terror to my heart.

A description of it, I cannot give. For a moment I tried to ask myself reasonable questions about it, but I could not give myself an answer.

It seemed as if many forms were engaging in a great quarrel, and all the while racing downward to their graves in the depths of some deep canyon.

I do not remember rising in that trying moment and stumbling back farther under the ledge, but I must have done so. Arms encircled my neck; I did not know whose. Indeed, I should never have known had not Porta begun to cry, with her head resting on my shoulder.

"I almost knew you went down with the slide," she sobbed faintly.

"No Porta, not yet."

To add to the terror of the hour, Trailer began to howl, having run out as far as he could from under the ledge to signal the storm.

I had fully thought Benjamin a young man of great courage. But the storm had tested him severely, and he had weakened. He flung himself on the ground with the words, "Give me bitter death." I should surely have done likewise had not the words of one precious to me stimulated me into being strong. "Oh merciful God!" and I for the first time since the storm hung my head, praying that God's strong arm should be thrown about our little party. My weak voice I knew was inaudible in the midst of the grinding, scraping sounds of the slide. Still I prayed on.

"It's the old oak," Porta whispered, as some

short, sharp crashing sound broke the continuous roar of the slide. Why she had thought of the oak I could not say, and I must have failed to acknowledge I had heard her. I shall never forget how hard it was in that perilous hour to divert my mind for a moment from the storm and upon the one whose feeble sobbings made my heart tender.

All the events for an hour after the slide are gone from my memory. I found myself breaking up the pack saddles that I might start a fire, which I did. The little blaze gave an unusual brightness, stirring anew our hope.

"Good news," Benjamin whispered, coming in under the shelter. "There is only here and there a cloud in the sky, and the cold north wind has entirely ceased, giving way to a stronger and warmer wind blowing from the southwest."

Here and there under the little shelter we found bits of broken brushwood, which were gathered and piled close in about the fast burning saddles. We could now comfortably warm ourselves, knowing that when the two pack saddles were consumed we had wood to replenish the fire.

Upon the first evidence of approaching day, Benjamin set off through the snow. I knew just where he was going, and likely of the burden upon his mind, but said nothing. I did not care to arouse any suspicion. I knew he was going to ascertain

whether or not the eight burros had gone down with the slide.

He soon returned, telling me by a steady stare the burros had been swept away. "Too bad," I whispered back, cautioning him not to announce the loss.

At last broad day came and we gladly saw the clouds so long hovering about the peak break away and float off across the desert, miles below us. For a moment's time we stood watching them. They were apparently rolling in broken masses, now and then attacking each other, and playing hide-go-seek, as Gertrude expressed it.

Time was dragging heavily, and each of us was praying for cessation forever of mountain storms. The rising sun shot its shimmering lines of light against the mountain side. To a painter this morning sunrise against a snow-mantled mount should have been gorgeous, but to us it was as unappreciated as though it were a blur.

Mr. Wells, still lying in a precarious condition, at last faintly asked, "Where are we?" With these few words he grew quiet. His anxious wife was bending over him rubbing his cold hands and asking, "Henry, dear, are you feeling bad?" "Yes, mother," came the feeble reply. "The activities of the world disturb me."

While we all stood about Mr. Wells, the morn-

ing advanced. Each had likely decided within his own heart the whereabouts of the eight burros, but who should be first to announce the sad fate?

The giant oak tree of yesterday was gone. Its old habitation was now a barren spot, like the Alpine Ranges.

"Henry, dear," asked Mr. Wells' patient wife, "do you feel able to move about?"

"Oh, mother, I can't say that I feel at all; to me this great change has been a blank. It's all my fault, for I knew well last night I should keep moving about or I would take a chill, and then—and then—" Here there came an impediment in Mr. Wells' speech, but he at last half whispered, "I'm a fool."

"The pack saddles were too much for your bravery," Benjamin teased. But Mr. Wells was not in a joking mood, as we soon saw.

"Here, here, Benjamin," I interrupted; but he would give answer, "Indeed, Mr. Wells, it has taken us all the morning to get the lead out of the saddles."

"You fool!" said Mr. Wells disgustedly.

Benjamin now asked each of the party to arouse an appetite, while he gave the food box an overhauling. "Come now, children, it shall be the food you eat that shall strengthen you for the furthering of our trip in the mountains."

"No furthering with me," firmly replied Porta. "Nor I," "Nor I;" and I joined in with the chorus myself, just to make it unanimous.

"Voted upon and unanimously carried, that we hasten out of these mountains at a double quick," Benjamin recited.

"Woman suffrage is what is ailing the voting," Gertrude remarked, bringing forth a good laugh from all save Benjamin.

The warm sunshine was now fast melting the snow. The small shrubs and oaks were shaking themselves of their heavy burden.

Gentle reader, stay with the six worn-out souls for a day. You may lose every cut of pain, and even the thought of the trial that haunts them as fresh memory recalls the horrors of the night in the storm; but stay! Mr. Wells is now wholly unfit for travel, the others of the party are so weary as to be indifferent, and lastly, Brave Trailer, the princely blood-hound, is unable to speak out his thoughts. We are to content ourselves with living through another day in this wilderness of the mountains.

The closing lines of this chapter shall pay highest tribute to Porta Phillips and Gertrude Wells as great discoverers. Upon their going to the spring, they discovered what at first sight was false, puzzling, perplexing. They found a clean-swept granite stairway: a rude stairway, to be sure; still in all its im-

perfections it led artistically down to the brink of the little spring.

Each of the party made haste to look at it. "What a life nature is," remarked Mrs. Wells. "What mechanical ideas it must have. First a foundation of purest granite upon which nature builds the steps. Certainly mother nature has countless freaks. Here are slabs of hardest granite; it is a stairway artistically hewn, architecturally lain, flat for steps, edgewise for standards."

Immediately after dinner I went for the fourth time to look at the stairway. It led up the mountain side, going on, and on, up and up. To me it became a deeply perplexing problem. I was unable to see its use.

CHAPTER XII.

A GREAT DISCOVERY.

To build the stairway had undoubtedly required centuries of earnest toil. It was wonderful, I told myself, studying it for a moment. Hewn slabs of granite apparently ran up the mountain-side for a mile. These were of uncommon size. Hastily measuring them with my eye, I decided they were approximately fifteen inches in length by four in width. The standards holding up these steps were about five inches in height. All this seemed to prove that the people walking upon them were exceedingly small in stature.

"A freak of nature," was the way Mrs. Wells put it, and I laughed to myself. Yes, and truly a difficult task for nature, if nature did the work.

I had seen enough for this, the fifth time, and turned back to the tents. Here I found our little party discussing the mysteries just discovered.

"What a wonderful thing life is, anyway," gasped good-natured Benjamin, bracing himself against a granite ledge.

"Yes; can it be that a link connecting ourselves with men of ages ago has just been found?"

ejaculated Mr. Wells, seating himself close to Benjamin: "Men as ourselves, soul and body as Benjamin?"

Presently Benjamin's conversation drifted directly upon the past and what might have prevailed then.

"I am half convinced through this discovery that these very mountains ages ago were peopled," said Gertrude.

"Yes, and these people drank of the little spring, and nourished their bodies upon the products of this little garden spot," added Porta.

The discussion waxed warmer and warmer, and being of little interest to me, I quickly slipped away, starting back to look at the little spring and the stairway. The waters of the former were now a muddy little pool.

Uneasy, I retraced my steps to the tents. Porta and Gertrude were now singing "Climbing Up 'Em Golden Stair." The song broke the dead silence of the lonely mountain-side and made me feel much like stirring myself shouting, "Oh let the echoes never die!" But after all, the music was not sufficient to comfort me. I was still weighing in my mind what promised an interesting study for the scholars of the world.

"What means this stairway, and by whom was it built?" I soberly asked myself over and over, as I

turned to look back toward the spring. "Perhaps it is my eyes that are false;" and I pondered, feeling much like returning to see if the stairway were really there.

A lost people designed the magnificent stairway, I told myself. This raised other questions. Had this mountain-side afforded ample room for an intelligent and industrious race? Who are these people, and where are they? Do they still live, or are they an unrecorded nation of generations ago?

To the Saboba Indians I knew this mountain-peak owed its name. But I felt that it could not have been this tribe, and I became all the more entangled in the meshes of the problem. It would be foolish for you to seek to convince a Saboba of an industrious race that once inhabited Tauquitz; for the Indian would spurn you from him, saying, if you understood his mutterings, "Foolish white man; evil spirits cannot enjoy true industry."

Brave Trailer surely saw by my long-drawn face that I was troubled, for he lapped my hand, with ears cocked up as if to ask: "Can I not explain it, master?"

All had come to me in the fancies of a dream. I had fallen asleep very early in the afternoon. Benjamin had just awakened me for supper.

After eating I left word that I was after wood, and stole away to look upon the stairway for

the last time that night. I surely must have been wholly oblivious to the surroundings, as I went forward with my head drooped upon my shoulders, for a flashing across my eyes suddenly stopped me. I turned about, and stooped to pick up what I had trodden upon. It was stone, my first glance told me, reddish brown in color. I stooped lower that I might gather up the little fragments into my hand to test them for their worth, but they crumbled into a brownish dust. I passed on, keeping a sharp look upon the ground before me. "'A mountain of mystery,' is a good title," I said; and I stopped to wind my watch and learn the time of day.

After a time I came upon many little particles of similar composition. These, I decided, were chips of earthen vessels. With one broken bit clasped in my hand, I turned about and hastened back to startle the party with conclusive evidence of the workings of men long since dead.

"Pleasure aside for a moment and to a little business," I abruptly addressed the party. "Here is the fruit of this day's gleaning." I exhibited the little bit of burnt clay. "Be convinced or doubt, as you will." I delivered the little particle to Gertrude. I had seen and felt clay modeled by potters as long ago as Testament times.

"How can it be possible?" Gertrude said, with

great emphasis, as she examined very closely the bit of clay.

"You are always fooling us girls, Will," added Porta, doubting that I had handed Gertrude anything other than a pebble.

"I am not fooling this time; here is the burnt clay. Now I wait quietly for your decision."

I did wait patiently, but as I did not receive the decision, I asked a second time that they account for the clay.

"Fairies," replied Porta smiling. "Yes, a good night for fairies to do such a grand piece of work in solid granite," added Mr. Wells.

"Come young folks, decide, as with me it is a mystery." Mr. Wells emphasized the word "mystery," by a determined shake of his head.

"Yes, God, through his good providence, reveals new things for men to study," exclaimed Mrs. Wells. "Man hardly solves the mysteries about him in the world before the Omnipotent brings forth from the earth's bosom secrets."

"Yes, God is the supreme," acknowledged Benjamin; "still I cannot see why God should alarm such insignificant creatures with such perplexing problems."

"Men are all insignificant until they do something to make them great," replied his sister Porta.

"Unless born with the title of duke or princess," added Gertrude.

"Something Benjamin doesn't know," muttered Benjamin, his reply sounding much as though he had muffled his voice far down in his throat.

The discussion drew to a close, as the evening hours passed into those of the night. A brisk north wind was soon swooping down from the mountain peak, promising an exceedingly cold and clear night.

The next day dawned bright and warm. The old mountain skirts still loomed up in the distance. The glaring desert was the same trackless waste. A few scattering clouds dotted the sky, silently recalling to our minds the horrors of the former storm.

After early breakfast we were off to the spring, and to the granite stairway that led up the mountain-side. The existence of such a stairway seemed impossible. But it was there, and we looked upon it, resolved to trace it on up the mountain.

"Fairy hunting," remarked jovial Porta, only to bring forth a similar expression from Gertrude.

"Foolish, giddy girls, to my notion," soberly replied Mr. Wells, his voice having a marked strain of seriousness in it.

At one point far along the little stairway Brave Trailer began to act strangely, running back to us and taking refuge close behind Benjamin. He had a right for his fear, as we soon saw. A few yards further on we came before an opening in the ground,

out of which poured the most hideous roaring and moaning sounds.

For the moment each was bereft of speech. As I looked at the dazed party I could think of but one comparison. We seemed as a forest of dead pine trees; speechless, lifeless, almost ghostlike.

For many moments we stood looking down into the cave, listening all the while to notes of mournful music. The strangeness of the cave soon wore away; and, tired from the climb, we thought it best to go into camp, and then, in the afternoon, come back.

While Mrs. Wells, assisted by Porta and Gertrude, prepared our dinner, and Mr. Wells gathered wood and brought watér from the spring, Benjamin and I stole away. In the secrecy of a distant canyon we planned that which we knew would meet with disapproval from our party. Carefully and thoughtfully we considered every point. All pointed to one thing, Benjamin's peculiar dream while he was in San Jacinto.

Why should we falter, now that the opportune time had come? Why give up when we had withstood the perils of the mountain storm? To go back would be suicide, and we finally decided to push on. Evidences all about us proved that men had once inhabited the cave, and it was only reasonable to suppose that we could do the same. So we decided to

go straightway that afternoon and explore all lying within its sacred bounds.

Benjamin broke the startling decision to the others of our party, and he did it successfully, for which I most heartily thanked him.

As was to be expected, we were at first laughed at, but when it was seen we were in earnest, laughter turned to seriousness.

"Reckless young men throwing promising lives away," were the words Mrs. Wells used in her endeavor to keep us from the undertaking.

"Foolish young men, thoughtless of danger," added Mr. Wells. "Never mind, boys, experience teaches dear lessons," murmured Porta, looking at her brother with a sober face.

The expected bitter argument had arisen: Benjamin and I were on the one side, Porta, Gertrude and Mr. and Mrs. Wells on the other. We won, but we had to promise most faithfully that we would be in the cave no longer than the second day. Our promise mended all rent affections, and now we had the hearty best wishes of all. Hastily, we gathered up a small sack of provisions, filled a large canteen with water and started.

To this day tears come into my eyes as I recall the sad faces that were there to bid us "God-speed."

If at any one time in my life I was afraid, it was as I stood upon the brink of that mysterious cave,

looking down into it, then up into the face of Porta Williams. For a moment I drew her to my side. I wanted to cry like a child. Chancing my life with the elements of the cave I knew well was chancing the life of one dear to me.

"I'm surely coming out of this cave a living being to honor and to bless you," I told Porta. Then I tore myself away. "Goodbye, goodbye!" I turned to place my foot upon the little stairs leading into the darkened depths. I saw Benjamin just bidding Gertrude a like farewell.

In another instant Porta, his sister, was resting her head upon his shoulder, and he was kissing her a brotherly goodbye.

Each knew well we were only men, with but one life, and that tossed between life and death.

How I cherished the sad parting! Yet I did it against my best welfare, for it made me long for someone to love.

Slowly and cautiously we descended into the cave. For a time we paused to steady our flickering candle-light.

Feebly we could hear from above two voices praying earnestly to God to preserve our lives. A moment we paused listening to these pleadings, then pushed on. How long those pleadings went up before the Throne of Grace I cannot say. Weakened and now regretful over the start we had made, I

smote my breast, crying, "Oh my God, comfort, bless and strengthen two pure, loving girls." And there in the dark cave we knelt down, each offering up in turn a prayer that to this day I thank God for fully answering.

CHAPTER XIII.

EXPLORING THE UNEXPLORED.

"We'll surely stir up a nest of hornets, if nothing else," Benjamin coolly remarked, lighting a second candle. This he held before him, and we saw a weird scene, one calculated to remain in the memory throughout a lifetime. We were encompassed in a passageway of pure granite. Ghostly figures seemed wildly dancing upon the cold, clammy ground. But even with all this to warn us, we ventured deeper into the unexplored domain.

Before many moments Brave Trailer checked us, his barkings frightening us into the profoundest silence. From that instant neither Benjamin nor I spoke. Our eyes were upon the many ghost-like figures as they danced against the wall, to the right, the left, and above. We wanted to run back up through the passage, but we knew the stairway was narrow, and fearing a crush stood still and wondered what was the best thing to do.

"Fools!" I said to Benjamin, shortly.

"Cowards," he replied, briefly.

Then again, just when we were about to continue going deeper, Brave Trailer sprang forward, at the

same time emitting such a roaring growl as to chill the very blood within us. With great force I jerked him back, but it was of little use; for he only tugged the harder at his rope.

Greatly frightened at this wild behavior of our dog, we advanced with the candles well before us. For a moment we saw nothing of an alarming nature, and wondered why our dog should act so unruly.

"Push him off into the space below," said Benjamin, knowing that Trailer would then engage the unknown being.

At first I blankly refused to consider the act, but as soon as the seriousness of our position dawned upon me I gladly consented offering my assistance.

"Grip your revolver, Benjamin, for it may come to a fight for life." Then I gave Brave Trailer a hard push, forcing him off the little landing.

A long moment of suspense followed, as we nervously waited upon the outcome of the act. "Benjamin," I softly whispered, trying to attract his attention.

"What?" he soon whispered back. I turned to him and saw that he all the while kept a sharp look into the shadowed cavern below.

"Is it all ghostlike?" I asked.

"It's a man, a being like ourselves," he whis-

pered. Benjamin would not admit that it was probably some ghostly object.

"We must fight, must stand our ground, or we'll surely fall victims to a strange people."

"What?" asked Benjamin.

"A flight, with the builders of the stairway in pursuit, would be to our disadvantage," I added, quickly. "He who had built the stairway would know every variation, even to the minutest crag protruding from above, or jutting from the wall. To flee means to stumble, to fall."

"Who is going to flee?" Benjamin asked. "Not I."

Then he acknowledged that he had seen only a shrunken corpse.

This excitement was quickly abated, and we, ashamed of our great cowardice, asked the Almighty God for a never-failing courage.

Trailer, a victor over the silent dead, we called back. He wanted to spring up and kiss me, but could not, there being in his mouth a long rib bone, undoubtedly that of a man.

"Brave Trailer," I said soberly, reaching down and taking the bone out of his mouth, "have you committed murder?" But the noble dog only thought I meant to commend him, whereas I meant to scold severely. I stroked him, and once again endeavored to explain the sin, but he sprang away.

For just a few seconds longer, while clearing my weakened faculties of the possibility of man, I watched him, listening to his barkings.

"I guess he's right, Benjamin, for I now can believe he has discovered a link connecting us with lost man."

"Then bring the candles;" and Benjamin and I hastened down to be with Brave Trailer.

The shrunken corpse, as we stood there looking down upon it, sorely tried us. There in its dilapidated state, inclining backward, was the skeleton. It was that of a boy, or if not, of a man of exceedingly small stature. The thought of touching it gave not only Benjamin, but myself, cause to shrink away.

A few moments' hesitation only shamed me, and I roughly gripped the frail form in my hands to examine it.

"Too bad," Benjamin murmured, as he felt of it. "You poor boy, starving yourself here in this cave for a century. Is it genuine?" he next asked, while I was passing my hand over the uneven skull.

"Marvelous discovery!" was my reply.

"I have it, Benjamin," I said presently. "We have discoved a spirit that Indian tradition says lived deep within the bosom of Tauquitz Peak."

"It may be so and it may not," was his answer.

"Such proportions!" ejaculated Benjamin a

moment later, as he took hold of the arm bone, apparently longer than that of the thigh. "Yes, and see here; its head is very large. And the shape, too, is most unreasonable; it comes to a point on the top. Legendary history of the Indian says that the spirits residing within Tauquitz Peak were exceedingly small of stature." Then he turned to Trailer. "You thoughtless canine," he said. "It were better far for us had you remained chained to your Riverside kennel. See there, naughty fellow, you have destroyed mayhap the last remnant of a pre-historic race of men."

Passing on we carefully placed the little form upon the landing, to carry it out with us on our way back. But Benjamin suggested that Porta and Gertrude might venture into the cave and be greatly frightened. So he gently removed the little stranger to a darkened corner along the stairway.

From this spot we made good progress, descending unimpeded deep within the bosom of the mountain. All was promising, when to our discomfort the little stairway branched, one branch taking a downward trend to the left, the other a decided upward trend and to the right. It was confusing, we admitted, looking first up along one lead and then down along the other.

Little knowing which one of the two would

prove to our advantage we started on, following out the one leading upward and to the right.

At last, being tired and somewhat weary, we paused to rest. Here we sat in a silent tomb of stone, little thinking we had reached the terminus of that particular branch. This tomb was but fifteen feet square. Benjamin, to prove it, raised the candle so as to flash the full light against each side. Just before us, upon the granite floor I saw corpse after corpse!

Not certain of this, and thinking it likely imagination, I sat watching the figures as if I fully expected they would move to convince me. Benjamin, as well as I, had seen them, I knew, but he said nothing. I continued to wait, hoping he would speak.

"Seven Indian Spirits, drowsy with sleep," Benjamin did at last groan out, apparently counting this number while he said it.

"Do they breathe?" I asked.

Benjamin stepped nearer them. "Cold in death."

Just then I saw come over his face a ghostly pale color.

"See, see, Benjamin," I said, calling his attention to the wall which that moment drew my gaze from the seven ghostly figures.

"They worship the sun," he said, his eyes

steadily fixed upward and upon a round ball of stone. "Yes, they are sun worshippers."

While sitting there looking first on Benjamin and then up at the Sun God, I fell into a reverie. "You stone God," I said slowly, "made so powerful by the trust of a great people." And next I pitied the dead. "Oh, you poor wretches, you dumb sun worshippers, you had better have lived just one day, worshipping the true God, than centuries worshipping that which is cold as stone."

Benjamin, too, was deep in study, for when I broke from this reverie all was quiet, much as though death had claimed even the living.

"Benjamin," I said, breaking the long silence, "the art designed in these granite walls is magnificent."

"Yes," he replied. Then all became quiet as before. Why had these people died, leaving unwritten a history of all that over which years of study had made them masters?

"Yes, it is the work of art," I said to Benjamin again, recalling his attention to the walls, inlaid as they were with little star-shaped figures.

"Ah, I see; it is a never-fading picture of our solar system," Benjamin laughed.

Intermingled with the little star figures were two prominent round ones, probably the sun and the moon. Everywhere about these two figures were

correctly cut circles through which jutted in zigzag lines deep carvings. All was sufficient to convince each of us that the artist had sought to portray the smiling sun or the sunrise.

A porous little shutter on one side of the tomb at times permitted a dim ray of light to shimmer through and aroused our curiosity. Over anxious in investigating this, we roughly tore away the little slide, soon to be permitted to look through a narrow passageway upon an immense lake of flame. All was beyond expression. We could not comprehend what it all meant. From that moment our hopes seemed to rise to some giddy height.

It was now long past the hour for lunch, so we sat down to eat. We were soon to go in search of a way by which we might reach the great lake of flame. While sitting there in that cold, quiet cavern, the chills coursing up and down our bodies, we ate our first meager lunch deep under earth's cover. Close beside us, sitting back upon his haunches, was Brave Trailer, one eye upon the seven corpses before him, and the other upon our scant eatables. A moment's look into the noble dog's prominent face, and one easily decided he would willingly give up his portion of the lunch for just a single toss among these dead forms.

I was soon buried in thought, asking: "Who are these people? Under what circumstances did they

perform this work of countless value? What manner of tools did they use in carving so artistically a canopy of sky, decking it with its luminaries, the sun, the moon and the other worlds? They are dead, I acknowledged, and are now, as I think of them, a peculiar people known only to their Creator."

"Surely dead," interrupted Benjamin, dryly, overhearing my mutterings.

We next retraced our steps to the branching stairway which we followed, going downward and to the left. At length all changed again, this stairway rebranching into seven others. Brave Trailer would take any, as he manifested by his tugging to forge ahead along the first one, but which of the many would prove to our advantage, was quite another question.

Even now, so far from the tomb encompassing the seven skeletons, I could not rid my mind of one thought, which I expressed to Benjamin. "Just think," I said, "had we lived in that distant day and up to this day, and had seen this people working upon their grand stairway, we would have learned from this watching all that we are now to wonder about!"

"Foolishness!" sharply replied Benjamin. "If that were so then you could clearly and correctly describe the way and the quality of their tools, the true resources upon which they depended."

I again overtaxed his patience by wishing I

might see one of the builders still alive. Benjamin cut me short. "You are but hoping for that which you do not try to ferret out," he said, sharply. "You must dig from your own thoughts, basing them solely upon good judgment, just what was done and how it came to be."

Following the first branching stairway we were soon led up to an abrupt granite wall. Up this wall zigzagged the stairway, at times reaching an angle of about forty-five degrees.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN UNDERGROUND SCHOOLROOM.

Hastily removing my coat, vest, hat and shoes, and telling Benjamin that I was going to find the terminus of the stairway leading so abruptly upward, I was off.

At first, unaccustomed to the steep climb, I felt much as would a painter swinging far out into space, knowing as he swung suspended in the air that the breaking of a single fibre holding his plank would hurl him to sudden death upon the pavement far below.

With each upward step, my bare feet set firmly on the granite. Chilling sensations soon called to mind the thought of treading on some serpent.

Benjamin was soon far below me, and I felt his absence sorely. I was entirely alone, exploring the unknown depths.

The upward trend of this stairway soon ceased, giving way to a nearly flat surface, which skirted the cave-wall ahead as far as I could see.

A little further along this flat surface was abruptly cut off by a granite wall rising high above me. Circling backward was the little stairway, as it

wended its way in true stair fashion still up and up.

The roughness of the rock was rapidly wearing my bare feet, and I was now pushing forward under great pain

I had not gone far before I found myself entering a large room, which I scrutinized very closely to ascertain if ghostlike skeletons were to be seen. I found they were not, and was grateful for their absence.

"Ah," I whispered low, "I have a good prospect of soon lifting the veil, still further revealing the consummate villainy of Tauquitz, the Indian's Evil Spirit.

I started to go farther into the room, when I was unexpectedly tripped, falling, and losing my candle. For the next moment I realized very little, receiving as I soon learned a dazing bump on my head. Half regaining my senses, I sat pondering. Had I fallen within the immediate grasp of ghosts that have long haunted this darkened cell? If so, I was surely to die, I thought. Immediately I began nervously feeling all about me, and wondering where my candle might be found. "I give up," I admitted aloud, listening to the words and their echoes that I might realize the true meaning of what it requires for one to prepare for death.

In another moment I was scolding myself for being a foolish young man. I was thinking of death

without first searching my pockets for a match. I did search, and I found the fragment of a lone match. It was only a single broken one, and I again scolded myself for neglecting to make all preparations for just such an emergency as had now arisen.

The situation, as I knew well, was of the most critical nature. Solely upon this little fragment of match was pinioned my future.

I took from an inner pocket all such papers as would readily ignite from the smallest spark.

Among these, I knew well, must be letters from Porta Phillips. I would burn them, I decided, then again it seemed I could not. I must act, though, and that quickly, and for a second time I took the papers in my hand, and pressing them against my bosom cried aloud, repeating the cry several times, "Oh merciful God, I burn a promise before dying in this dark cell." Then I turned to the little fragment of a match, fondling it and praying that divine help might come, and with the prayer still on my lips I scratched the sulphurous head of the match upon the cold granite.

A glorious result was the reward of this deed done with prayer on my lips, and for this I give a hundred thankful omens to God. The little bits of paper readily ignited, and with this light I was once more hopeful of escaping.

I was upon my feet as soon as the papers burned

up, and found the candle, instantly lighting it. The great trial which I now believe to have been one of the most trying in my life was past; my chances of escape were now good. As I soon saw, I had unfortunately tripped myself upon some implement. For a moment it looked unreal, and then again as I watched it seemed a link leading up to some greater discovery.

"Concise evidence," I whispered, as though I were content with my first hasty decision. The next minute I had fully looked over this implement. I decided it was the long-lost link connecting the stone worker of to-day with his brother of an unwritten age.

The examination proved too deep and far reaching for me to give you even a hasty description. All that I can say is that the copper out of which this implement had been milled was so hard that I could not cut even a hairline across it with the edge of my knife.

Historical records are not faulty, I decided, as though I had doubted them. Then in that quiet tomb I studied, reciting at times over and over bits of history wherein it is said copper was once hardened by ancient races. The art is lost, history further records, and I wondered if it were possible for such an insignificant soul as myself to discover the lost processes.

Just before me was one single pile of granite

chips, but upon closely examining it I found it to be built from many sectional parts of some designed stairway.

I decided that I was in the class-room for stone workers. In this class-room the sons prepared themselves to step into the places of their skilled fathers.

The many broken and unevenly hewn pieces of granite, as I handled them, became to me fullest proof of the many years of practice required to become competent in this work.

I was next deeply impressed with the many low stone blocks encircling me, and then with a much larger block directly at my back. Around some instructor must have circled many students, I at first decided; and then with the flitting of the imagination I saw close about me those pupils. I paused, as I looked upon them, to listen to their concerted questionings. "Where has this giant come from?" one would ask of the other in a feeble whisper; and he in turn would then whisper to me and bow his head. And then from another pupil would come this question: "Did the guard permit you, a young creature, to enter this, our domain?" These curious beings had little stature as I conjured them up. They were apparently comfortably seated upon benches of stone less than ten inches high.

I was standing over a large chest soliloquizing and telling myself that perhaps this was the breaking

of a dawn that would give birth to a clearer idea of the workings of lost generations of men.

One moment I was reaching down into this chest to withdraw from it some strange tool. Another moment I was withdrawing my hand fearful of displacing the implement.

The strangest tool and the one I cared most to remove, was made of some metal resembling copper. From all appearances it had undoubtedly been hammered and sharpened until it resembled a long, bladed pick. Perhaps the most puzzling thing about this tool was its edge, it being so nicked as to cause one to believe it was used more for filing purposes than for chiseling stone.

Thoughtlessly, in that trying moment, I failed to examine these tools further, passing them by.

I was no sooner away from these tools than I was searching my mind for knowledge. How did these people work in a place of perpetual darkness? I knew if they had done so they were not the descendants of the Mound-builders, or the Mound-builders descendants of them. They were, then, an entirely separate race susceptible of seeing in the darkness.

Against the wall and resting upon little granite shelves, were many little square-shaped stone pots or vessels, as one chooses to call them. These square blocks of stone were scalloped out, making a stone pot with a capacity equal to the tatom holes used in an

after day by the Indian for milling of the acron.

A blackish brown substance, evidently a liquid, but now verging into a solid, sealed over the little pots about half way to the top. This scum I easily extracted, permitting the escape of an odor which thoroughly convinced me of the liquid being none other than crude oil taken from its natural reservoir.

Here I had positive proof of the use of crude oil so far back as the stone age, and upon this I pondered, asking and re-asking myself many questions. Where did these people secure this oil, and how came they to be modern in its uses? In an instant I saw myself rich. There was the probability of discovering oil wells richer than the best of to-day.

After all, I was a foolish boy, I admitted. I was again hoping for vain things; and with this thought in mind I stepped to another stone vessel to see if it was similar to the others, and I found it was.

Little could I realize that crude oil had supplied a lost race. Truly it had been the race's advancement required it, they banishing the torch to take up methods more modern.

It was by mere accident that the method by which these oil pots perform their function was discovered. Two minute holes had been drilled directly through the bottom of them, through which, as is the case in a fountain pen, a small flame was fed, drop by drop.

"A people long dead, carrying their arts with

them, and known only to their Creator," I said softly.

Recalling for the first time that my companion was waiting upon me, I took out my watch and learned to my surprise that it was five o'clock in the afternoon.

I found Benjamin patiently waiting for me. Brave Trailer was barking to signal he had not forgotten me. Benjamin, as was to be expected, began questioning me. I only remember this one answer I gave him, which brought a strange look into his face as I recited it. "We have the wealth of the Indies, Benjamin. Gold, purest gold, cannot buy that which is not for sale. God blesses us, Benjamin; we have a far better gift than the railroad king has in his running express. Pen does not tell, and words from feeble lips do not speak the history yet unwritten, now revealed to me in a single hour."

Soon we were hastening along another stairway in search of a route to the beautiful phosphorescent lake. A little further along this stairway centered with six others, some leading out to the right, others to the left, before and behind us, octopus-like. For a long while we stood at the center, undecided which stairway we should follow. These waiting moments were fast multiplying; still we argued and offered suggestions.

At last we turned to follow the one leading downward and to the left. In a few places it became necessary to hold tight to what were Alpine-like paths. Trailer was eager to guide us, but he would go here or there. He was only a foolish dog as to seeing beyond a moment's time.

CHAPTER XV.

WITH THE MYSTERIES OF THE SPIRITED TAUQUITZ PEAK.

We believed that just beyond, glorious dawn must lie. So we recklessly hastened through many dark passages, to be once more in a bright cavern. When the goal was reached, we found that the reward was not of itself a mere trifle, but that it held out still greater promises for that beyond. Just on before us was an out-spreading lake, beautiful beyond comparison.

You who read may think this a freak of the imagination, but are you not abusing good reasoning in this? With all patience be seated for a moment in the ampitheater of an opera; the lights are all extinguished, and you sit there musing in utter darkness. The curtain at last suddenly rises, revealing in all the blending of beautiful colors a lake out-stretching as far as the eye can reach.

See how it flashes, this flood of soft light! How pleasing this thing of beauty! In another second all grows dim, then reflows to the brightest ebb, and each shift changes the aspect. Ah, behold another and far different blending of colors! Do they not

please the eye even more than a rainbow and become more restful to the mind than the green valleys of Vermont? Is not this harmonious array of colors so long lost, regained to man? and this paragraph does not half describe the scene before you.

Trailer at first hid himself, and then sprang forward as if to drag us on into the never-ending vista in the distance. His doggish ambition was surely to discover all in a single day, but how could we anticipate so much? Our weary bodies were staggering, and our eyelids had long since become weary from the constant flare of the candles.

I looked at my watch for the time of day, and although we were still one-quarter of a mile from the lake, I saw that the hour was six.

Where were we to rest in this cave of stairways leading to and fro? What should our dreams be during a long night? "Ghostly fancies," Benjamin ventured, when I repeated the thought aloud.

We soon ate a scanty supper, and in a short time made ready for the few hours of promised sleep. A little later I was awakened by a bright light reflected against the granite walls. Brave Trailer, alarmed even quicker than I, sprang upon his fours and emitted one of his bloodthirsty growls, which he quickly followed with a long roaring bark.

"That's the stuff, keep on stirring about," muttered Benjamin, half arousing himself. "Don't you

know it is sleeping hours?" he scolded, at the same time covering his head.

"Brave Trailer is warning us of danger," I soberly responded; at which Benjamin hastily sat up and glanced all about him. "It is the lake of flames," he announced.

"The lake is relighted by some new fuel," I added, seeing all things stand out anew, and the reddish colorings change in an instant to the whitest hue. "What! what!" I cried, laying hold of Benjamin as though I sought his protection. For with the changing of this last color there had come a deafening rumble, the echoes closely following, breaking the silence of the tombs.

In another moment a rolling, bubbling and sparkling wave of phosphorescence coursed in over the lake of white flames, dashing itself to pieces against the granite shore. When this wave had spent itself, and all had partially quieted down, a beautiful foam arose, passing off in a vapor. Soon, to add to all that had displayed itself so wonderfully, came a score or more of beautiful rainbows, all perfectly arched over the lake.

"The latest of our discoveries, the real rumblings of this mysterious mountain peak," I whispered, glad that there was even a possibility of my being right. "A great lake made up entirely of a liquid metal," was my decision, as the rainbows

multiplied, forming again into entirely new designs.

And so, with sleepy eyes, and with constitutions praying for rest, we were solving or endeavoring to solve, the mysteries of a rumbling that never jars.

Dark ghost corners were rapidly growing of less consequence, our candle's light was becoming as insignificant as a straw ablaze amid a prairie fire. One wave pursuing another coursed over this phosphorescent lake, and with each breaking, little ripples shot forth, displaying an hundred colors. Before a large wave, and apparently preceding it, came the loud rumblings as of distant thunder.

"It is but the raging of the Indian Spirit," soberly whispered Benjamin, hearing a mighty wave groan as it dashed into the granite shore line.

A great wave raced in upon the bosom of the lake, displaying itself grandly. "Ah, behold the hundreds of little ripples in the distance," said Benjamin, calling my attention in time to point out a high wave that leaped from the bosom of the lake, mounted high in the air, and then with a mighty splash fell over backward upon its trail.

The great beauty of the lake made us grave. We were now caring very little over the uncertainty of our escape. We had become pupils in the study of the many mysteries that were being unfolded. In the study we were learning of a lake and of a people

that likely inherited it. It is only because flesh is weak that we praise ourselves in a hopeful moment.

"Fare-thee-well, noble and fathomless lake of grandeur; thou shalt be honored without limitation by all history-loving people; thou shalt be admired by a cultured nation. This is true, they have long waited for a revelation of thy mysterious hand." And then we turned to resume our napping.

"A few hours more and we go up and out," were Benjamin's first words upon awaking.

"Are you sure?" I asked, testing Benjamin.

"Indeed," he answered, "we shall go when we have fully explored the very heart of this Tauquitz Peak. We have yet to discover the reason for the long rumbling of this peak."

The lake had again resumed its role, though it was now an hour of the morning. The shades of delicate green grew for a moment very bright, and then changed to a most brilliant purple. In a moment this brilliant red re-changed to other indescribable hues.

A glance upward showed us a far more beautiful aspect than the colorings of the lake with its great length and breadth. Decking the ceiling everywhere were white glassy clusters, likely ages in the process of formation. Everywhere, it seemed, the same little clusters shone resplendent in their marvelous whiteness. Like icicles under a trough they hung

suspended, reflecting a beauty that played fantastically with a tantalizing evanescence. But in a moment this indescribable beauty lost its charm for us, we became frightened. Trailer, whom we had last seen sleeping to his heart's content near by, was missing. He had deserted us and we were left to care for ourselves. Benjamin's shrill whistle echoed and reechoed. We waited, but the dog did not come.

I soberly told Benjamin my idea of the desertion of the dog. "It is quite possible Brave Trailer has grown lonely for his kennel in the Riverside Jail, and has upon his first thought of it hastened upward and outward."

"I have had about enough of this, anyway," Benjamin admitted. "This chasing after what was long ago, is not to my liking."

"If you say go, Benjamin, we will endeavor to make our exit from the cave." Benjamin did not reply at once, and I had ample time to turn over the idea in my mind. I soon decided against my own proposal, for I did not want to leave the cave with all the promises of a something as yet unparalleled.

"I do say go, and I am serious in the matter," he said finally.

"Yes, but you're too late; I have since decided I shall stay."

"Yes, there it is again," and Benjamin began

scolding me for taking back my own words. "Why not go?" he asked.

It took the next few moments to persuade Benjamin into staying some six hours more. Within this time we were to explore the shores of this lake.

Hastily eating a scanty lunch, we started directly down toward the lake of flames. In an instant, when we least expected, some beast sprang toward us, growling as might a lioness eager for some little morsel with which to feed her kittens. "Oh, Trailer," I exclaimed, afraid that this might not be he. "You are fooling me, sir," I said, as I drew away from him. "You would kiss me." While I hugged him tight, I whispered in his ear, "You naughty fellow, you have marred the pages of newly-made history with the marks of a deserter's hand."

No doubt my words went deep into the dog's heart, for he surely asked in his dog language, my forgiveness.

He was hardly away from my tight grip and forgiven, before he again sprang forward and away. We quickly turned back from the lake to follow him.

"Go slower," cautioned Benjamin, gripping me by the arm and pulling me back.

"Why?" I said, greatly surprised at his action.

"Perhaps Brave Trailer is leading us into the spirit chamber of Tauquitz, the one of evil."

"You Indian you, Benjamin," I said—for it is only an Indian who believes that to visit Tauquitz while you live assures you of a visit to him after death—"you are a fool, Benjamin Phillips." I tore myself away from him. "I'll go–but hold!" I had strong reasons for shrinking back from that upon which I had just looked.

"What? what?" inquired anxious Benjamin, not seeing the laboratory wherein Tauquitz, if there be such a person, experimented with his captives, the Indians. "You mean more skeletons?"

"Yes, but quite different than heretofore. The bones rise to great heights and have a weight in tons."

I pushed ahead, then stopped. I had seen Brave Trailer standing within a little cove scalloped out of the granite wall, before a flickering light. Quite likely, I thought, he was wondering why all should be as it was far under the earth.

Close about us were skeletons of enormous size. Were they real? What could they be the parts of? We had not seen an animal whose bonework should be of such proportions.

"Animal remains," Benjamin freely admitted, pointing out to me large horns or tusks.

"See Benjamin, they have posts for their feet, quite unlike those mentioned by Julius Cæsar, for they were jointed. I'll venture to say they are remains of the extinct mastodon or mammoth." I

pointed to parts of the structure proving the theory.

But this strange little fire on beyond Brave Trailer meant so much to us. In fact the skeletons only testified to death and an unknown language, while the little fire spoke for its living.

Fully believing someone had lately deserted the little fire, we set Brave Trailer into following them up by the scent. He obeyed and was soon sniffing over the entire floor of the little cove.

"I cannot scent them, for they fly instead of walk," he must have said, as he turned to me and kissed my hand.

"Bloodhounds are not just the thing," Benjamin remarked, criticizing the dog and citing incidents where they had failed in their purposes.

"Likely not, Benjamin," I admitted, for I was thinking of a living remnant of these people.

A strange odor and curling smoke became quite noticeable as we drew near the little fire.

"It is crude oil that supplies this fire," I said. I fully believed the natural reservoir was just under the granite wall. I rubbed one hand against the wall, and when I withdrew it I saw it was well blackened as though covered with an oily seepage. "It's a fact, Benjamin, merchantable oil has been supplying this little parasite."

He pointed with disgust to the little flickering flame. "Yes, indeed, it has wasted great wealth."

Then I knew Benjamin felt much like rushing in upon the little flame and fanning it out.

"A new theory, Benjamin," I admitted, "and I trust a feasible one. This oil spring has kept up this little flame since its starting by a people now long dead." All about this were veins running through the granite wall, and having a peaty-like appearance.

As we went, we stopped to procure a single tusk of the mastodon. As far back as the Mammalian age these bones had lain here, we decided. Benjamin began to search for a tusk, but I found a good specimen first.

"See here," I called, "the teeth alone attest the origin." I had Benjamin's attention. "The molar tooth with its little nipple, or masta, assigns this tooth to the great mastodon, as Mastodon Giganteus, i. e., "Giant Mastodon."

CHAPTER XVI.

WHERE THE SPIRITS RUMBLED.

Straight down to the shore of the phosphorescent lake we hastened. As we drew close to the rushing, splashing metal liquid, Benjamin reminded me that as an old, hardened sailor sees in the great storm only a plaything, we saw in the lake a thing of interest rather than of worry.

"It reminds me of an iron foundry," I remarked, stopping and looking into the writhing fluid.

"Yes, and a vast foundry at that," he replied.

The beauty of this lake continually charmed us as, hastening along its shores, our eyes watched its unruly behavior.

When our hopes for even a more beautiful aspect than the grand display of blended coloring were highest, a drama suddenly unfolded before us. It was such a picture as the mind long retains. Back from the lake shore, and reclining in open graves, lay many sleeping the sleep of death. Hundreds, dare one say? Yes, many hundreds, Benjamin would have it. At first we felt it was a terrible, or better, a sad dream. Exaggeration, oh imagination,

flee! the dead are multiplying from hundreds to thousands!

"Oh, Bonifacio Cabse," I muttered. For in that trying moment I thought of the Indian policeman who for five silver dollars told me of the Tauquitz Legend.

There came up with this flitting of my imagination a well-bound volume. Upon its cover I read in gilt letters, "Substantial History." And then as I tried to read and re-read the title it occurred to me that the Tauquitz Legend, once with me wholly fabulous, was true history. The Indian warriors, five in number in history, had now become thousands. For another moment, as I silently watched the reclining forms, I was selecting the frame that so sturdily had borne the living flesh of Mystica Algooat. Close beside her I saw the stronger outlines and I called them those of her lover, Diego Sinon. Then, even nearer than these, and just before me, were the frames of Chief Algooat and Judge Sinon. They, as I thought of them, were still ruling their Indian dead, not in flesh, but in spirit. There was the framework beside them of the wise man Lalla, and he too, in his skeleton form, was directing this sleeping through unwritten centuries.

All these were my thoughts and my own singling out of characters once so active in legendary days. Aroused by the impatient Benjamin, I started

on and passed through the skeleton group, experiencing as never before the solemnity of the tomb. We had paused, as I remember, to look back upon the skeleton forms when we perceived a marked uniformity in their positions.

"What means this?" asked curious Benjamin. I saw him tracing with his finger a semi-circle.

"And the head bones are facing the darkened wall," I said, with deep interest. "Why is the back turned upon this lake of beauty? Sadness, Benjamin, must have been in their hearts."

Up against the cave wall a grinning head looked down upon us. With a moment's study we knew its purpose was sacred. In shape this idol head was likely patterned after that of its designer. Only for one thing, and this disfiguring it, we should have seen here the grandest piece of stone art yet discovered. This idol head, as we carefully made a study of it, took on a new form, resembling some evil god. To Benjamin I attribute this belief. He persists that the idol head represented that of the evil Tauquitz. Perhaps Bonifacio Cabse knew well the name of this idol, for he always told that his father had taught him, without a single omission, the Legend of Tauquitz. Very possible it was too, that should Bonifacio Cabse know of his father's god still in stone, he would worship it.

This idol head bore horns of wickedness and sup-

ported ears of wonderful acute hearing. Here again the Tauquitz Legend proves itself. Bonifacio Cabse sincerely told me that Tauquitz, with his mighty ears, heard him telling me for the five silver dollars, the sacred revelation of his being.

But we were forced to pass this idol hastily, and we did, trusting that whosoever our successors were in the gathering of Indian history, they would become so deeply interested as to go back to the Indian in his day, and there pick up the string where we were severing it.

We turned again to the fiery lake and then up along its shore, bidding a sad adieu to those upon whom we looked.

"What now?" whispered Benjamin, giving me a sudden pull by the arm.

"What! what!" said I.

"Brave Trailer is in trouble."

Fortunately for us, the noble dog had just discovered a small spring of water colder than artesian and as pure as a flowing brooklet.

How our voices in that moment responded to the joy pulsating in our hearts. Not only did it satisfy a great thirst, but it as well determined whether these people drank. They evidently did drink from the spring. Why it had been necessary for them to build the stairway down the mountain side for a half mile to the spring there, is left for the reader to say.

Not very far along the immediate lake shore we came up against a stone square, house shape. The same Tauquitz Legend! This stone house was likely patterned after the one Tauquitz, the evil spirit, called his prison cell. "But it is only conjecture," said Benjamin, laying his hand against the corner, "though it is surely hand-made, there being little sign of nature's handiwork in it. Centuries in building, I'll warrant."

Midway along a darkened side of this stone square we saw, upon copper hinges, a stone door standing ajar. Once inside this little room we found it about nine feet wide and approximately ten long, with an exceedingly low ceiling. On the opposite side a passageway led down into some lower depths. Here, still leaning against the wall, were two skeleton forms. They were two sentinels, for this is what we were soon calling them, believing they were there guarding a secret room below. Had we not been over-indulgent, we might have easily bidden adieu to these unknown depths, but we could not pass them by. Our curiosity was aroused, and we were determined to please ourselves. In tightly clinched bony fingers these sentinels still retained their spear-shaped weapons. Benjamin thoughtlessly laid hold of one of the weapons, and all save a copper spear crumbled to dust.

"Holmes says," I began, "that both Greek and

Trojans knew the art of tempering copper so as to make edged tools. This was about 1000 B. C. So, Benjamin, have these skeletons held silent guard here for forty centuries; and do they withhold from us the one process for the hardening of copper?"

"Greeks and Trojans may have tempered the copper for them," he replied with a laugh.

Quietly, in the sombre depths of the darkness, guided only by the flickerings of a single candle, we stole down through the little passageway. Once within a secret closet below, we came upon great piles of raw copper, while hanging against the walls were many curious looking copper tools. Instantly we felt we had surely discerned the secret that afforded the skilled worker the tools with which to master the hard granite of the mountain.

"Wonderful work has been done with tools invented and made in this closet," Benjamin whispered.

I could not refrain from sarcastically replying, "Yes, hideous looking gods as well."

It was there in one corner of this secret closet, and just before an immense pile of native copper ore, that we probed into the depths of mysterious processes. For moments it seemed we should not be able to understand what were the processes wrought out in four telescoped crucibles. The largest crucible of the four had evidently been drilled directly into

the corner of the room and served the purpose of shielding the three smaller ones, tapering down within it until the smallest would hold about one gallon, liquid measure.

In between these crucibles was a crystallized composition, greenish in color. To look long upon its brightness brought tears into our eyes. The only thing for us to do was to extricate the first covering, which we did, exposing a darker green, evidently the alloy given off by native copper while undergoing the changing process.

Benjamin thoughtlessly reached down into the crucible, took up into his palm a small portion, and in this way began testing it by pulverizing it with his thumb. To my great surprise, and to his sore displeasure, he began to experience great pain, as though the greenish crystals had all the properties of a very strong acid.

Somewhat angered at his mistake, Benjamin roughly jerked from off the wall a copper pick, and with an angry voice avowed he would destroy the crucible. I knew he meant it, when I saw him strike the crucible a very hard blow. But it was of little use.

Uprooting the large crucible and removing it from the corner, we were given access to the inner three. We here made our great mistake. When we had removed the outer crucible, leaving the three inner ones unprotected by it, they crumbled away.

It seemed strange to know that crucibles withstanding years of use should fall away in a moment. "Now I'll finish it," said Benjamin, standing near and still retaining the pick. I am safe in saying that he did so, and that he did so well. Lifting up from scattered fragments portions of the metal, we lifted also many of the granules of this greenish substance. Here we had the secret all truly confined in the shapeless mass.

Into handkerchiefs a small quantity was tightly tied. This we should present for analysis to some expert assayer.

"Tantalize him," said Benjamin; from which I inferred that he meant the composition would puzzle the assayer.

He was surely right, for any expert able to name the ingredients, and with a knowledge of using them, would become a master in the hardening of copper. Man, for many, many years has sought after the ingredients enclosed in Benjamin's handkerchief, and so the little sample became the more priceless.

We were forced to go, as we did not dare to stay longer. Thus we were driven out, losing in our untimely departure many rich historical records likely awaiting us in other parts of this underground laboratory.

"Let us hasten, and let the Indian ferret out a better reason for the rumbling of his spirits," said

Benjamin, calling my attention to the short length of our candle.

"What time is it?" he asked, growing anxious over our escape: "my watch has run down."

"Six-thirty," I replied.

"Not six-thirty p. m.," he repeated in astonishment. "Due to be out of here, then! I'll bet a horseshoe the girls have been at the mouth of this cave a dozen times. I know sister Porta: and then Miss Wells—" He stopped.

"Likely," I said, "seeing it's a dead go."

"Dead go with us," Benjamin replied, taking the words other than I meant them.

"Pshaw! Benjamin, I know they'll not worry a moment: we're not likely to be more than a day overdue, and what is that?"

"Yes, but they will worry," he insisted, with a determined shake of his head. "My sister has the grit, and I have no doubt she will coax Gertrude into entering this cave with her."

Time passed rapidly as Benjamin and I sat looking upon the lake. Likely our thoughts were in harmony, each upon the probability of the girls entering to search us out. What if they should undertake it and then get lost within limitless bounds, I thought as I watched the wild behavior of the seething lake of flames.

"We'll hasten back," I wanted to say, half ris-

ing to my feet. But how dared I give up when I knew we must be near the goal? I broke from my brief reveries only to hear Benjamin earnestly questioning himself. "Is it possible," he was saying, "that anything serious could befall the girls should they—" Here I lost his low words.

Ten minutes later the whole scene changed. The lake, a seeming limitless sheet of flames, turned into a tunnel shape a hundred yards ahead. The end came unannounced.

While standing there, looking deep into the tunnel-shaped mass of flames, from out it came a trail of waves each splashing the metal in a spray. We had now surely reached the very core of the mountain, and knew well its secrets.

In the unknown distance this mysterious phenomenon had come in upon the lake. It was not to us the Evil Spirit Tauquitz riding his sea horse, but troubled waves of sea water sweeping across the lake of metal flames. It is likely that its behavior bore another significance for the Saboba Indian. Its onward rush was a prophecy of the torture he must undergo for the sins he had willfully committed. I wondered if Mystica Algooat had been tossed about by these fiery waves, and if her soul had landed safely on a solid shore.

"Run back, or you will be washed in the lake," cried Benjamin, alarmed at the rumbling and groan-

ing volumes as they swelled and ebbed. I was surely very stupid for I did not heed his cries.

"Reckless youth!" and Benjamin's scoldings rained down upon me; still it seemed I could not move.

Moments were passing, and I was feeling the touch of the liquid metal as it splashed across my body, stinging like fire. Why I was not swept away I do not know. The rushing volumes were far away, and only brought near by the brightness of their breaking.

These groaning masses passed quite as quickly as they came. The rumblings of the spirited mountain peak were not caused by earthquake auxiliaries or a mighty wind. All was the flowing of the cold waters of the Pacific ocean in upon this lake of heated metal. It may startle the Indian to hear this, and he may disbelieve it, but it stands as the decision of two having seen and experienced.

The many colorings dancing and reflecting from one water crest to another were beyond the harmonious blending of Rosa Bonheur, with her skill and wise choice of colors. Far back in the distance we heard plainly the splashing of these same beautiful waves as they dashed themselves into a spray against the granite shore. Then, seemingly everywhere, came the echoing and re-echoing, as of a rushing stampede of cattle. Often the rumblings grew loud

and died away. The waves drew near, passed, vanishing as quickly as they came.

Seeing all this, we turned backward, graciously rewarded. For an hour we followed along the immediate shore of the lake without finding a stairway leading us away from it.

Weary and worn from the excitement of the day we decided to take an hour's rest, and then make the final attempt to escape from this cave of many wonders.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SEARCH BEGUN.

On the day of our departure Porta Phillips and Gertrude Wells came for the second time to look down into that darkened cave. The sun was just setting, the heavens had already grown dim, and the shadows against the mountain side had fast darkened.

"A lonely afternoon passes with the sun's setting, thank God," sighed Porta, as she looked at the mountain over which the sun had just sunk.

"Yes indeed, very lonely," echoed Gertrude.

"Dear me, how forsaken, dark and dismal this cave grows as the night settles upon it, Gertrude."

"Yes dear, and think how dark it is to Benjamin and William. Let us go back to camp, Porta." No sooner were the words spoken than Porta was off, leading the way.

"Here, here, fretting so soon," teased Mr. Wells, striving to cheer the young ladies.

"Yes, Henry, haven't the girls the privilege of fretting?" interrupted Mrs. Wells.

"Limited privileges," Mr. Wells quickly re-

sponded, adding before his wife could catch him up, "Come, cheer up girls, cheer up. I can only think the boys safe."

"There it is again, Henry; you might think a chicken happy when afflicted with the croup."

"Women take a pessimistic view of everything."

"Yes, anything suits men," said Mrs. Wells, quite disgusted, as she called Porta and Gertrude into the tent.

The dawning of another day saw all signs of the storm rapidly disappearing. The water was running down the mountain side in gushing little streams.

The cold, wet canvas tents, so long under the gloomy ledge, were taken down and set up in the open, in the bright sunshine. The change was very marked, for it brightened the spirits of the party.

The birds, that had been absent for several days, were now flying up from the valleys to sing anew the glory and the beauty of the mountain side. The velvet mosses, shining with freshest lustre, were such as would make one think only of the jagged ledges upon which they clung, wearing dressy suits of variegated hues.

Mid-afternoon breathing in upon the little party found it slowly ascending the mountain side. The members of it were climbing up to the mysterious cave, there to watch for us. Not an hour passed as

they waited, without the inquiry, "Aren't the boys tardy?"

"Nonsense!" would speak up some one, generally Mr. Wells, who usually concluded with some expression like this, "A six o'clock train will not arrive before six o'clock. Tuesday never gets in ahead of Monday. Logical, isn't it?" looking rather wise.

"Not always," replied Gertrude, nodding negatively.

With all these and many other questionings the afternoon slowly tolled itself away. We had disappointed those watching by not coming forth from the cave. Still for a few moments more, and up to the hour when the shades of night were darkening the mountain side, they watched and listened. It was hard for them to think of giving up. The night was growing chilly, and Mr. Wells, fearing an attack of the rheumatism hastened back to the camp. "Don't stay too late," he cautioned, "one cannot trust even the cowardly coyotes. Better give up girls, for the boys will not be out of the cave before tomorrow night, and I'll set the hour at sundown, considering you have figured just twenty-four hours too soon."

"Hush Henry! you do like to tease," Mrs. Wells scolded.

The two young ladies waited until it grew dark, and only when they saw plainly that they must give

up the watch, did they go to the camp. They had planned a secret which was to be unfolded early the next morning.

"We've planned to go into the cave and meet the boys, mother," said Gertrude at breakfast.

"Planning to capture big game," ejaculated her father.

"We've as much grit as some of you faint-hearted men," declared Porta Phillips firmly.

Mr. Wells began heartily laughing. "You've less grit than one needs to have while carrying out such an undertaking; then, too, I'd venture the same old forty-one cents that I've been betting away for years, that the cave is brimful of lizards, toads and even snakes."

"Hush now, Henry," said Mrs. Wells.

"A husband is abused, stoned and dragged to death," murmured Mr. Wells, changing his seat away from his wife. "Wife here, simply favors an undertaking which in my mind cannot end otherwise than in disaster. Foolish, giddy girls anyway, go if you will. I'll bet the same old forty-one cents against a pair of Sunday suspenders that before many hours my wife will be entering that cave to search for you girls."

"Yes, quite possible, Mr. Wells, but there will be little danger of your coming in search for me."

"Not in the least, wife." As to whether Mr.

Wells meant this as he said it, no one seemed to know.

By sunrise the next morning things about camp had taken on a decided air for business. All was contrary to Mr. Wells' wishes. The two young ladies greatly helped by Mrs. Wells' encouraging words, were making all preparations for the undertaking. The moment for the start up the mountain came soon. Mr. Wells still held out against the scheme, denouncing it in many ways. "Go and be contrary," he said in his farewell words. Turning to his wife, he added, "If this turns out disastrously, remember you, my wife, share alone the responsibility. A man is a fool to let a woman run his end of the business. Almighty God, from this time henceforth I shall be the master of my household. A wife like mine would run even a fishing smack on the rocks, fog or no fog, —just run it there." Mr. Wells walked nervously away toward the spring. He would go there to worry further over the probability of Porta and Gertrude getting lost. "Women folks have little business in politics, in business, in law, or in anything else that means life or death."

All the while Mr. Wells was sitting there abusing his conscience with his own words, the three women were climbing the mountain side to the cave. And likely at a time when Mr. Wells prayed for the strength of a master, three as humble as he, just be-

fore the cave, were praying for a success in the rescue.

The parting came, Porta and Gertrude slowly and cautiously going down into the sombre depths, and Mrs. Wells turning back toward the little camp.

Once out of sight, Mrs. Wells realized what the presence of Gertrude and Porta had been to her. For a moment she hesitated, stopping on the open mountain side to study her hasty actions. "I have been stubborn and have treated Henry wrongly," Mrs. Wells acknowledged to herself. "Yes, for all I know I may be sending my own dear child and Porta Phillips down to their graves. A stubborn will and a broken-hearted husband;" and Mrs. Wells sat down upon a near-by rock to cry.

Porta and Gertrude had only two candles to light them on their way. One making the cave walls ghostly, the second was lit.

Often as they followed the winding stairway they stopped to catch a breath, one to send out a call, hoping it would bring back an answer, but none came. After a few moments' rest on a broad landing, they slowly continued. Soon the single stairway branched, one fork leading upward to the right, and the other downward to the left. It was not until now, standing there in the dim light of the two candles, looking down upon this branching stairway, that they realized the first fear of becoming lost.

"You follow out one branch and I the other," said Gertrude, breaking a long silence.

"No, no, we must not part, or we'll be sure to get lost."

"Downward and to the left let us go first," said Porta, leading the way. "It is very, very steep. Hadn't we better call once more?" So Gertrude called, only to awaken echoes, and re-echoes. "We must be in a tomb," she went on; "the boys have surely perished."

Here a sense of timidity overpowered the once strong courage, and together they started backward and upward. As far up as where the stairway branched they hastened without pausing for a second time to question one another.

"We are going out, leaving the boys to die." And Porta Phillips then and there said she would not go a step further up the stairway.

They were soon following the branch of the stairway that led upward, into a small room. It was here, against a wall, that a dimly flickering light shone through, greatly frightening them. In a moment each stopped as if fearful of what she might behold. It was several minutes before either dare tiptoe across the little room to peer through this little lighted passage in the distance. When they did they looked upon an endless lake of fire. Flames upon flames, as waves upon the sea, were swelling and

breaking. Spray was ascending over the lake and displaying its hundred colorings.

"Oh, how beautiful!" whispered one.

"Inexpressible," whispered back the other.

"See," and Gertrude drew her companion nearer her,—"see, dear, the mighty waves are rolling toward us, and oh, how strange they are as they toss themselves and groan as if suffering great agony."

Amazed at all they saw, they continued watching each swell upon the lake, and then when the waves broke against the shore and the spray shot upward, they cried, "How beautiful!"

For many a moment they waited; speech became inaudible. At last they saw two dim forms walking erect, and one upon its fours, pass slowly before them along the immediate lake shore.

"It's my brother Benjamin, and William," said Porta as the joyous tears coursed down her cheek. With another hasty glance they were watching the slowly moving figures passing off around the lake.

"Oh, do call them back, Gertrude; my voice is so weak; do call!" Gertrude called, but her voice, like that of her companion, was weak, and then, too, it seemed only to spend itself within the little room.

For an instant the three figures paused as if to listen, but it could not have been so. One figure motioned as if to throw something into the lake, and then the three passed on. Gertrude, as frightened

and as alarmed as Porta, called yet another time, and again a moment later, with hope fast ebbing. And when Porta awoke to call for her first time, the angry waves upon the lake smothered her voice. "They are gone," she whispered with a gasp.

A half hour passed as they watched the lake, wondering if the figures would not soon pass back along its shore. But they did not, and first one, then the other, began weeping.

They hastened back to the branching stairway determined to go down, down, deeper into the unknown. All was promising, until the junction of seven stairways lit up within the candle's rays.

"We may not overtake the boys very soon," admitted Gertrude soberly, having first counted the seven branching passages.

"Never mind, we must attempt it," and Porta started along the fourth stairway, which led downward to the right.

"What! what!" she soon cried with fright, as she threw herself back against Gertrude. "A vast submountain cavern opens before me," she whispered.

"What do you mean?" asked Gertrude, surprised.

"I mean that before us is the unknown. What an underground empire, enveloped by the closest secrecy!" Just then Gertrude caught her first glimpse of the interior of the cavern they were entering. "Yes, brother Benjamin always says dead men

tell no tales; neither do dead Indians."

"Unbearable," cried the other, turning back. Poised, with stolid glares, were many grinning skeletons.

"Oh God! does it mean that they were born only to hold intact this silent dominion, or to prey upon us?" and each gave utterance to a short prayer.

"All is unbearable! unbearable!" and Porta and Gertrude turned to flee, but not far, for by them were many beautiful sea shells artistically arranged along the wall.

"I'll answer this voluntarily," said Porta, wholly forgetting the skeletons. "Scientists say, as I am told, that the Colorado Desert is but an old ocean bed."

"Yes, but how do they know this?" interrupted Gertrude.

"By a study of the shells they have gathered upon the dry sands."

"But what has the ocean to do with these people?"

"Understand, dear, they likely hunted and fished upon it. From the ocean they have gathered these shells."

"What has scientific study to do with hailing the boys?" seriously argued Gertrude, wishing for something better than a race of men to think about.

"Nothing whatever, yet we stand here and look

upon here multitudes of shells and fish bones."

—Why not gathered from the bay like?" asked Gertrude, beginning her plea to have the young men.

—From the Indian Ocean, for in Indian Legend it is claimed that there was such an ocean."

—Ah, I love Indian tales." Gertrude interrupted by taking up a beautiful polished shell.

—Yes; then you, Gertrude, and the rest of your San Francisco friends if your gathering shells that rested long under the waves of an Indian Ocean, now a desert vase. But as well let them if your seeing large fish bones. How nearly they are arranged. It is not by some have taken. Perhaps the Indians building the stairway arranged them." and thoughtless of their great weight. I have been now to lift me back to the place. But when she touched it, it crumbled away into powder.

—I've been wondering how you. Have living in San Francisco, know so much about the Indian Legends as preserved in Indian Legend."

—I have some friends who tell me." and she smiled.

—Likely Mr. Warehouse tells you, seeing he is a great investigator of the Indians."

From the museum of shells the little starved were straight ahead for a few feet, and then turned abruptly to the right. Encouraged by this, and fully believing it would lead direct to the lake of flames.

Flora and Gertrude listened in. Unfortunately the candles had burned below the half-way mark and early darkness was beginning them. Still a little way in desperate chances they determined to hasten, hoping soon to be within the light of the beautiful cave.

—Foolish wenches," said Flora silently, pausing to look into the little cave.

—Likely a wretched spot, dear all," added her companion. For Gertrude had seen the bank in the little cave a small box jammed in a single stone monument.

—Tributes to a King.

—Yes, likely so in old, old anything," responded Flora, now seeing the box and a head crossed upon the end.

—Truly, it is a sun idol, and likely the sun god is in the inside." and Gertrude drew Flora close by her. —Shall we disturb it, seems it is sacred?"

—Go ahead and break the chain."

So Flora wandered the little box from the cave and exposed it to the light. In another instant Gertrude had lifted the same for viewing it, exposing many little shining treasures. Bright glassy jewels possessing great brilliancy, they say.

—Priceless, perhaps," whispered Gertrude, carefully replacing the lid.

—Yes beautiful, so beautiful they are beyond a hasty comprehension.

"How ancient we might be," suggested Gertrude; to which her companion replied, "I trust not so ancient as proud. Well, we are not stealing gold from King Solomon's mines, anyway."

"Yes, dear, but are we not taking treasures from a dead people? Let us replace them," said Porta laying it back.

"No let's not."

Thus they argued, finally going from the cave, carrying the box with them.

A little way along the stairway, they stopped to look once more upon the little treasures. It was not until here that it dawned upon them that their products were likely the fruits of an underground diamond field.

Overjoyed at the find, and fearing someone might rob them of the treasures, they turned about and started rapidly up along the stairway. They would first carry the treasures out of the cave, and then come back again to meet the boys.

In a moment of excitement, while they were hastening upward, the little box slipped from the girl's grasp, falling upon the stone surface and breaking into many little pieces.

"The frail thing," scolded Porta as if to shift at least a small portion of the responsibility.

"A frailer thing, dear, I fear, is the finding of

all the little treasures. See, they sparkle so brilliantly. Genuine, I guess."

Porta and Gertrude stopped to gather them into a handkerchief.

The time it took to gather up the little gems told very markedly upon the fast burning candles, there being less than four inches of unburned wax left.

"A dreadful fear comes over me," said Porta, soberly.

"Why now, dear," were the soothing words of her companion.

"The candles, see, they give us less than an hour to make good our escape."

"I hadn't noticed the shortness of the candles," said Gertrude, as she gripped up the little bit of wax and started up along the stairway.

The mad rush made their breath come fast, and the heart spurt as if to leap from its bounds. They paused for a short rest and then hastened upward. A glance to either side told them that they were passing through many underground museums.

"What a heavy draft courses past me," exclaimed one, stopping to learn from whence it came and where it was going.

"Oh, my God, does this mean Thy rescuing hand," Gertrude prayed.

Greatly encouraged, they followed its upward

coursing. "It is true," exclaimed Gertrude, clasping her hands over her forehead and sobbing faintly. "The comforting current of air must lead downward and backward. It does, and we're sure to die," she gasped, turning to see if Porta had all the while run after her.

"Do you mean it, dear?" cried her companion, as weak and as fully discouraged as she.

"Yes, we're to die in this tomb."

"Oh, Gertrude dear, I see a light." Porta pointed out a dimly burning light back upon the stairway over which they had just passed.

"Oh, thank God, it is dear Mrs. Wells," Porta cried aloud. The certainty of Mrs. Wells' presence drove away all thoughts of dying where she had fallen. "Oh I'm so glad, for see, she comes nearer and nearer." Just as she uttered these encouraging words the little light she had seen flickered wildly, died out, then flashed up, flickered again and in a moment died out entirely.

Frightened in the sudden darkness Porta called to Gertrude to extinguish quickly the little light so dear to them.

"Bandits have discovered us, dear, and are preparing as Indians to crawl up nearer."

"No, no, don't say it, dear. Dear me, dear me," and each lay back and began crying most bitterly.

The very darkness about was adding to the horrors of that trying moment.

"God, do save us," Porta was crying, wringing her hands as if she experienced great pain from within. In another moment these horrors were even increased by the deafening growl of some beast.

"Here, Brave Trailer, be quiet," said a voice in good English.

"Light up ahead, you cowards," called the voice, "or we'll turn loose upon you."

"We'd better light the candle." "No, no."

Thus Porta and Gertrude argued.

"Light up, we're here for blood. Light up; all ghosts belong to us."

"Here, here, Benjamin!" said Porta, as she recognized the voice.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FINAL STRUGGLE.

We had slept, as near as I could tell, about six hours. Our awakening called to mind the lake of fire. We were soon leaving it behind, taking with us a few relics and an empty canteen. Why we were carrying this canteen, we did not fully know. We had clung to it and were prizing it as though it were our only friend. We were now ready to go, and had cast a single die, determining by it our chances of escaping. The chances were there but they were very few, while the ominous numbers presaging death were many. No food, no water, in a little while no light!

For a moment I tried to break away from the thought of death by whistling some inspiring tune, but I could not whistle, for my heart was not tuned to music. I tried to speak instead but even the words died in my throat.

The long silent stupor through which I had been musing aroused Benjamin's curiosity, and he asked if I didn't think it about time we were testing half-fed muscles. "Yes," I said, still continuing my musing. I was surely being tortured in thought by

those I had seen lying along the lake shore in their open graves. In these moments I saw in my imagination the framework once animated, and giving stability to a Chief, a Judge, a Goddess of Sunset, or an heir to all the tribe's riches in sheep. And then, as in thought I gleaned the Tauquitz Legend, I was convinced that Silveric Sinon had an unquestioned love for Mystica Algooat even at the time when the trials of Indian Court were casting him down.

"Come, what do you mean by delay?" said Benjamin, as he caught me by the sleeve. I followed, he leading the way, along the lake shore. On one side were the shadowy walls we had seen the day before, while on the other were the sparkling beauties of the phosphorescent lake.

"What is the hour?" asked Benjamin, adding in a much lower tone, "My watch continues to find the pressure too low in here for it." I opened mine, and paused, alarmed; I looked upon the dial for moments, the hour so startling me that I had failed to speak. Greatly disheartened by the lateness, I felt like hurling my watch into the lake. I paused, however, wondering if I had read the hour aright. I believed I had, and I acted hastily. The watch, although a father's gift, I threw far into the lake.

"Foolish," scolded Benjamin, adding, "Why do you destroy a keepsake?"

"Simply because it has become a burden."

"Why so?" he asked quickly.

"If time doesn't lie, Benjamin, we're lost. We have been traveling along this lakeshore for hours."

"I trust not," he coolly replied, asking that we hasten.

In a little while we came to a place where the shore line recurved, going backward. This we knew would only lead us deeper into the unexplored. "Go back," said Benjamin, to which I replied, "No sir, we had far better plunge into the unknown and untraversed regions; there, that little place yonder seems inviting." I had no sooner said the word than Benjamin started, entering the passage I had pointed out. The precious candle light bore a single ray of hope as we followed through the quiet passageway.

"Ah, feel that," said Benjamin, as he held his hands well before the candle.

"What, a draft of air?" I asked.

"Yes, and so strong as to make the candle flicker wildly, almost enough to fan it out," he added.

The draft, although a very strong one, was encouraging, and I, remembering Brave Trailer, gave him a heavy patting, as though I thought he should have the praise for it.

Once far back in the darkened passageway, a yearning for the beauties of the lake came over me. The light had been so cherishing, and the life within it had all the while suggested the very presence of

friends. We were now sorely tempted to go back to it but each spurned the temptation, for we well knew going back would be going back to die.

At times we were recklessly pushing upward, Brave Trailer voluntarily leading the way, and then at other times we were following him more cautiously.

"What!" exclaimed Benjamin, stopping short. "Brave Trailer meets with some hindrance." I saw Benjamin lift high the candle, so as to throw its rays well before him.

"Skeleton forms, I presume," I whispered, little thinking of the force of the expression when I said it.

"I fear not," said Benjamin, all the while slowly drawing close upon the whining dog. "Oh, you foolish fellow," he scolded, for when we came upon him he stood mounted upon a square block of stone less than twenty inches in height.

After all, "skeleton forms" was the befitting title, for just before us, almost under our feet, lay several shrunken corpses. "Some more of your legend characters," remarked Benjamin, in a way that made me feel he believed the Tauquitz Legend altogether false. I knew it was not, having seen so much. Dear to me had become the Legend, and while I again studied it over I believed its characters had surely lived, performing the functions Benefacio Cabse had told me they did.

"Eight skeleton forms," announced Benjamin, startling me from my study.

"Indeed, Benjamin," and when I looked down upon them the thought came to me that we had surely found the connecting link.

"What next?" he asked abruptly.

"Everything goes to prove these people ate from this block of stone."

But Benjamin was stubborn and opposed my theory, putting up in defense this question: "Why not have these people playing games?"

"Possibly they were," I admitted, "but can you account for this vessel?" I pointed out a curious utensil upon the block of stone.

"I'll retract," he said, lifting up the vessel, apparently made from a large tusk of the mastodon or mammoth.

Our curiosity once wrought up, we had forgotten our desire to escape. Here were evidences which of themselves answered the question so long puzzling the searchers in the remote past. Benjamin asked me, and I answered to the Indian: "Is food a necessity in the future world? It is, if this be the Indian future kingdom."

Strewn about upon the flat stone surface were charred berries, probably some close ally to the corn or pea. Aside from these berries, small white chalk lines told us of the fish bones, the residue of the peo-

ple's feastings. This past man we were here studying had surely perfected himself in his manners while eating his food. From all the evidence he ate only with fine pincers, tong-shaped and not larger than hair pincers.

The time wasted counted upon our candle's length, and this frightened us. We almost ran after Brave Trailer, who when we said "go," led us. Twice to my knowledge we passed through little rooms filled with many secrets yet unsifted, but the fate of one lost in the wilderness spurred us forward and we ran on and on.

"Too bad to pass them," I murmured to myself as I hastened after Benjamin.

"Leave all gleaning until another time," he said abruptly, turning about to see if I were closely following.

After a time we paused for breath. Directly before us, leaning against a granite wall, were many, many strange implements. They were modern, as a single glance told, and had likely been used for the tilling of soil. Our verdict was that these people in their day tilled the soil, planted and raised much of the food upon which they existed. Surely they must have raised the pea or bean upon the one little garden spot where we had first set our tents. But we were now thinking too seriously of our rapidly burning candle, and so we pushed upward, leaving in the

darkness secrets deserving prolonged study.

After a half hour of furious rushing Benjamin fell exhausted, muttering as he sought to rise again, "Go on; keep pressing upward." In a flash I realized what this all meant. He had fully given up all expectations of escaping an early death in the cave. I knew well the hours of constant worry had greatly weakened his frail system, and that his rushing from the lake upward so far was his final struggle.

"I cannot go, Benjamin," I said soberly, large tears running down my face and falling upon his prostrate body. "I cannot, no I cannot, Benjamin," and I rubbed his forehead tenderly as if to cheer him. I had not yet lost all hope. I patiently waited, listening all the while to the silent voice of the tomb. But the wear of those silent moments upon my mind was telling, and I knew I must soon see an escape or die there with Benjamin. The task of retracing our wandering steps I knew was by far too great, and I would not consider it.

"Oh, glory, glory, glory!" I could have shouted, when like a flash I conceived a plan of escape. It was so comforting I quickly told Benjamin, who raised himself and cheered me with the words, "Well it's possible."

"Come, Brave Trailer, let your blood-hound nature save us." Benjamin heard these tender words and lifting himself up he petted the dog. Untying

my shoe and rubbing Brave Trailer's nose with it, I said, "Go."

"It's so foolish," admitted Benjamin, half-laughing.

"A regular trick," I admitted; still I knew it was the only thing that might save us from death.

"Go," I said the second time, and then Brave Trailer abruptly turned about and ran back down the stairway with Benjamin and I closely following.

In a few moments we knew the candle would burn out and we would be left in utter darkness. Where we were to meet this darkness, and where Brave Trailer was leading us, we had not yet paused to question. And then, when all hope seemed gone Brave Trailer suddenly turned again, this time to the right and up a very steep pitch of stairway. When it seemed we must give up from sheer exhaustion this steep pitch gave way to a more level walk, and we took new courage and pressed on.

The little fragment of a candle began flickering in its final gasp for existence. At length the little light it gave faded, flashed up, faded out again, and then went out entirely.

Before either fully realized the ghostliness of the darkness we caught sight of a dimly burning light less than fifty feet above us. Brave Trailer, as quick to see the light as we, gave out a blood-thirsty growl,

which he in his customary manner closely followed up with a long deafening bark.

"Be quiet," I scolded.

"Light up ahead, you cowards," shouted Benjamin, "or we'll turn loose on you. Light up; we're a hundred strong and here for blood. Light up; all ghosts belong to us."

"Here, here, Benjamin, think first before you speak further. Suppose they are stronger than we, what mercy might we look for?" Benjamin paused for a moment to listen, but no reply came.

"What can we expect, anyway," he asked, "considering we're so far from civilization? There is but one way out, and that is to misrepresent our strength. I'll bluff them anyway," and he snapped me up in the middle of another sentence. "Light up, ye sneaking prowlers!" Just as Benjamin uttered this last demand a second light was seen to flash up.

"You're getting down to business," Benjamin added, firm and unquivering. Not a sound came back to combat his greeting. We waited and waited and then at length we surged forward a few feet, stopping to survey the figures outlined about the light.

"My God," I heard Benjamin exclaim, suddenly. Then I realized that it was Porta and Gertrude.

CHAPTER XIX.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

It was certainly difficult to decide which of us was the happiest over this unexpected meeting. Joyous tears ran freely down our cheeks, as we tenderly spoke to each other.

At one time I cut the greetings short and gave Benjamin a chance to offer an apology for his rough welcome, but he had forgotten he owed one. I would have made it myself but for the fact that Porta and Gertrude were too excited telling the trials they had been passing through, to listen. When another opportune time came I had forgotten it.

When the joy rising with this happy meeting wore down a little, questions arose among them: "Did we rescue Porta and Gertrude, or did they rescue us?"

"Almost burned away," said some one, calling attention to the short length of the two candles. It was true, for in less than one-half hour we would be in utter darkness.

"We'd better be up and going," said Benjamin, taking up one of the little burning candles; and with

Brave Trailer leading, we followed the stairway leading gradually downward.

Gertrude stopped to have this question fully answered: "Isn't Benjamin leading us deeper into this unknown depth?"

"I hope not," called back Benjamin, sharp and clear, having overheard the question.

This stairway continued downward for about twelve feet, and then it took a sharp turn upward. At times the passageway through which it led grew narrow and the draft so strong as to snuff out the candles open to its broad sweep. We were now continuing with but a single light.

After a time this one candle sputtered for a moment, died away, then flashed up, and finally went out entirely. From here we tried first to follow in the darkness, but it was so blinding that we were continually in great danger of falling. So we lighted the last small piece of unburned wax, and started on. "This means we're in pretty serious straits," says Benjamin soberly and with a shake of his head, which indicated a strong meaning back of the expression.

Very soon, fortunately, the stairway gave way to a somewhat level surface, over which we nearly ran. But as this ended, the light went out. The testing time had surely come. Benjamin, we supposed, would be first to announce it, but he did not,

remaining still and silent. The little candle he still held was flickering wildly, and we saw he was watching it as if it were a dying friend. In another moment it gave a sputter, and all was dark. "Our chances are not in vain, thank God," I heard Benjamin whisper, and then we knew he must have seen something far more hopeful than we.

"What is it, brother?" asked his sister Porta.

"Oh thank God, sister, the last ray of the candle was cast down upon the junction of seven stairways."

Each knew well the meaning of the junction of seven stairways, and we offered thanks unto God for the rescue. How comforting to know we were less than a quarter of a mile from the cave opening, and that that part of the stairway leading to it had no steep patches in it. "Yes, yes," Gertrude whispered, "how fortunate it is that we are on the stairway leading out."

All about was blackest night, and we were realizing anew what it meant to be enclosed in the tomb of a long silenced people. Our minds surely acted consecutively, for when Benjamin started leading upward holding tight upon Brave Trailer's tail, his sister Porta grasped him by the sleeve, and Gertrude Porta's sleeve, and lastly I, in due order, followed.

The few minutes upon the stairway were as minutes of blindness, even as we knew it, a more

confusing blindness than the blind man has to contend with.

Oh, how that struggle upward was testing each of us, and how our hopes arose and died away! When hope within at times died down to the smallest spark, I was prone to cry aloud, "Come messenger, take, after this career is over, my hard-earned historical records, forward them in all their imperfections to accomplished publishers, and for the sake of the life that bought them, send home a copy." And then, as the silent moments told upon me, "Oh granite walls, fall, crushing life from this feeble body, as I am willing to die here, knowing I have done my best."

Just how the others of our struggling party were faring I could not tell. I knew that with Porta and Gertrude it must have been very hard. The journey upward and in that blinding darkness was oh! so long. The end, it seeemed, would never be reached; still we patiently struggled upward. At last there came the balm. Benjamin began to cheer, and we who followed knew he must have seen the land created for man to live upon.

"Ah how glorious! hallelujah!" Porta made the silent cave ring with a loud cheer. Just above and into the shadowy heavens were hundreds of twinkling stars.

"Thank God, it is the same old canopy," Ger-

trude cried, as I assisted her from the cave.

Once upon the open mountain side, we knelt in a circle, bowing our heads and with words of sober prayer offering praises before the Throne of Grace.

Even then, as we looked about us, the shadowy boulders were become cave walls, the crushed limbs of trees mastodon skeletons, and the smaller rocks the skull of dead Mystica or Diego Sinon her lover.

Day was fast breaking in the east, the hillside fading to a gray.

"What's that?" said Benjamin, pausing and pointing far down the dim mountain-side to what appeared much like a heavy fog in the valley below.

"Oh, it's surely rained since we have been in the cave," exclaimed his sister, having felt of the ground and found it very damp.

"But those clouds I am referring to," added Benjamin, answering his own question. "Yes it has rained, and likely will rain again before the coming day passes."

With the breaking of the early morn we were hastening down the mountain side to proclaim our escape to Mr. and Mrs. Wells.

"Where is the sack containing our relics, Benjamin?" I asked in a trembling voice, for I could not see it about his person.

"Right here, safe and sound," said Benjamin, as he reached up to lift the sack from his shoulder.

But it was not there, and he paused as if to study. "William, where, where have I left it? Surely I have not lost it."

"Benjamin, surely, for the sake of your own fame and title, you have not lost it!"

"Lost, lost, let me see," Benjamin paused for further study. "Oh someone give me the authority to say no."

Just then I saw Benjamin weaken. "Tell me then, Benjamin, where you left it, and I shall go back, even to the lake, sooner than lose the evidence it contains.

"Why, Benjamin, have you so thoughtlessly robbed history of an inestimable gem; forgive me that I say you have, but I must, in giving full account of the loss."

Oh, how easy it would have been for me in those trying moments to have flung myself down into the cave to let Benjamin prove its existence. How hard it would be now to convince the world of the reality of the cave since the evidences were left behind, still buried with those of the remotest past.

We had one thing to comfort us, however. In a few days we were coming back to go deeper into the cave, and then with the light of a lantern recover this parcel.

The landscape that morning, as the rising sun reflected itself against the mountains, was grand; be-

yond question it was as beautiful as we could hope to look upon. Then, as seen early in the morning, skirting the valley far below, was a tossing of clouds, out of which an occasional peal of thunder rolled.

"That thunder is heavy," remarked Benjamin. "See, the lightning brightens the clouds higher up." Just then a second and louder peal of thunder sounded out. "Yes, and we'd better be getting out of here before we get into another slide."

Porta and Gertrude must first relate their experiences to Mr. and Mrs. Wells. Entering the tent, we found them excitedly reciting their story. Evidences were very plain that Mrs. Wells had been crying, while in Mr. Wells' case the chances were good for his having done likewise.

We were hardly comfortably seated, before Mr. Wells turned to us, and without greeting, began joking. He would call us Ben and Bill, the discoverers of the north pole. Although not in the most pleasant mood, we were glad afterwards we took Mr. Wells' joking in the proper spirit and managed to joke back.

"Come, come, no more tales are to be told today," said Benjamin, "as it is necessary we get off this mountain before another storm mixes us up."

"Conditions have been on the strike since yesterday," remarked jolly Mr. Wells.

"How so?" I asked.

"Well, my wife here has been wishing she were in the cave looking up the lizards and toads of forty centuries back."

"There is not a lizard or a toad in the cave," snapped Gertrude, taking the part of her mother.

And then, following Gertrude's abrupt answer, rained in upon poor Mr. Wells his wife's curt reply, "I didn't say I wished I were in the cave."

"See, see," and Benjamin and I were called to look upon a dozen or more brilliant stones.

"Oh, the dear little things," said Mrs. Wells, picking up one the size of a grain of wheat. "How you shine," she added, turning it over.

"It's a genuine diamond," said Gertrude, fondling it.

"Diamond nit, just a gravel stone," remarked Mr. Wells, interrupting. "Nothing but a chinc bug." He called for one of the little stones that he might name it rightly. "Mighty like diamonds, after all," he acknowledged, sitting back and shaking his head as if he did not fully understand the nature of the little gem.

"From the cave," ejaculated Porta, completely surprising Benjamin and me, as we did not think it possible that we had found productive diamond fields, buried deep in North American soil.

"We've surely missed the cream of all," said Benjamin, snapping his fingers in my face. "We've

been fools enough to think of most everything except diamonds."

"Boys haven't any use for diamonds anyway," interrupted Mr. Wells.

"Come, come, we are going down this mountain, and that before the storm gets here," called Benjamin, hastening out and beginning to release the guy ropes. One secret vow each was asked to take before leaving this spot, and this vow in substance constituted a promise not to expose the presence of the cave.

It took some little time to break camp, but soon we were away, Benjamin carrying upon his back the tent canvas and a small roll of blankets, and I carrying blankets and many other little camp articles. As to how the others made up their burdens I had not noticed.

We were away none too soon, for the misty-looking fog was rapidly condensing into a light rain. This became heavier as we drew nearer to the valley below, driving us to the shelter of a giant oak. The forepart of this dreary forenoon the rain continued to fall incessantly; not drenchingly, but steadily enough to keep us under the sheltering oak tree. Here in turn, as we waited, we told of the mysterious cave and what it contained.

"Rich in a day," was the slow exclamation of Mr. Wells, as I told of the oil spring.

"Ah, millionaires in a day," added Gertrude,

hopeful of great wealth to be found in the diamond fields.

Secrecy became the one watchword of our little company of six, duly organized for the further development of an underground property.

The rain, after all, had proved a God-send, for it had destroyed all our tracks leading to the cave. It was helping to keep our secret, or, as Porta chose to call it, "a secret known to God by six, and one," this one, I presume, being Brave Trailer, our princely bloodhound.

We had planned to notify immediately the landlord of the Del Strawberry Hotel on our returning to San Jacinto by another route; also by this same messenger we would send a check, fully compensating the burro keeper for the five burros we had lost in the storm.

It was not until late in the afternoon that the storm began rising up along the mountain side and the rain gently ceased.

"What point are you calculating to reach?" asked Mr. Wells of Benjamin and me, while we were busily packing things for the furthering of the journey.

"We are going as straight south as the instinct of man will lead."

"Pretty definite," replied Mr. Wells, turning to go.

"Thomas Ranch, Mr. Wells," I added, helping Benjamin out with his brief reply.

A half-hour's steady travelling carried us to a high bluff looking down upon a typical Spanish Rancho.

"It's surely an old Spanish Rancho in reality," said Mr. Wells.

"Yes, the country is always real to city gentlemen, and, yes, it's often rich, sometimes worth more than brick blocks and city lots. Here, Mr. Wells, is a good sample of country wealth," and I pointed out several large herds of cattle.

"Nigh several thousand," he said, trying to act the part of a Texan while in sight of long horned cattle.

"Nigh Californian," remarked his wife, turning to find her husband busily counting the scattered herds upon his fingers.

"Out of fingers," he said at last.

As we drew nearer the ranch house, we could hear the landlady speaking in Spanish to her several vaqueros, presumably dictating the care of the herds of cattle. Upon an old fashioned gate, and just before this low ranch house was lettered in plain English characters, "Should you chance this way, make this your home." The words created a desire to meet the kind-spirited author. Often times later in life I have paused when entering the old fashioned style of

gate, just to see if those words had ever been written upon it. And then when I find it missing, I often wonder if I am welcomed by the proprietor of the house.

Just within the gate, some half-dozen dogs sprang up from here and there in the yard, giving their landlady full notice of the arrival of strangers. Brave Trailer would in an instant have given battle even against great numbers, had not severe scolding cowed him.

Even before we could knock upon the rude door, it opened, and standing in it was a large robust lady, apparently of pure Spanish blood. "Can this rancho do something to aid a stranger on his way?" this Spanish lady asked in her broken English. "Yes," and I nodded politely, soon explaining the assistance she might afford us by serving us with a lunch, for which we should recompense her doubly.

"You are to pay me, do you mean?" The Spanish lady paused for my reply.

"Yes ma'am," I said.

"No sir, not I, free Californian; many strangers have I helped on their way. Not to a free Californian can you pay for kindness."

Although we did not in any way wish to throw too much burden on this Spanish lady, we were very tired, and did after lunch ask to remain for the night.

How very kind she seemed as she quickly said, "Indeed, strangers, my house is open to you."

"How far do you go to-day?" asked this same lady, when she had served us with breakfast the next morning.

"To San Jacinto," I replied. "We shall walk unless we meet the stages in from Kenworthy."

"Ah, my dear strangers, the stage will not be going your way until Saturday. But then, you need not wait for it; you shall have my stage, for I have horses numbering hundreds."

Loudly Mrs. Thomas called, "Jose, Jose!" and another Spanish boy whose name we could not call to mind, and when they came she told them to make ready the spring stage. A spring wagon, I would call it; and of an early pattern, for its short bed set high above the wheels.

"Rather quaint," remarked Porta, smiling when the three-seated spring wagon was driven to the front gate.

"Here, friends, is your conveyance, and may good luck go with you," were the last words of the Spanish lady, whose kindness shall ever remain in our memory. The many thanks we showered back upon her have left an echo still ringing throughout the hills surrounding the Thomas Rancho.

Our story is nearing its end. We were now driving down the broad streets of San Jacinto. The time

came for sending the stage back to the Thomas Rancho, and as we graciously thanked the two Spanish boys, we slipped in the pocket of each five dollars in gold coin, saying as we did so, "We must pay someone." The coins had hardly left our fingers before they were returned with these words, in lame English: "No sir, Mrs. Thomas will punish us should we receive money for a kindness."

Early this same afternoon Mr. Wells, Benjamin Phillips and myself hastened to my residence to see Mac, whom I had commissioned to care for all my interests. We found him, and it was: "How did you enjoy the trip? What think ye of the mountains?"

"Ah, you smile, Mac; tell us what makes you so happy," I said.

"I was afraid you had perished in the storm," he roplied soberly.

"What storm?" put in Benjamin innocently.

"Why I read of it last evening." In another instant Mac had procured the San Jacinto "Daily Register," and sure enough as he had told us, the headlines read: "Six tourists perish in the mountains."

At first it seemed that it would be only a matter of a few hours before the mysterious cave would be discovered. But the longer we thought, the better assurance we had of its still remaining undiscovered by others. We had duly notified the landlord of the Del Strawberry Hotel of our safe return to San Jacinto by another route.

"Mac," I said slowly, addresssing the honest old man a moment later, "I'm going to San Francisco, and that Saturday, so if there is any business of great importance mention it now."

"For how long?" he asked.

"Four weeks," I replied.

Then Mac began enumerating over on his fingers a dozen or more things he thought needed immediate attention. I went over his list very carefully, but found none of any great importance, and I told honest Mac to use his own judgment. This pleased him, and I was glad I could go, knowing of the high spirits in which I had left him.

"Well," he said, calling me back, "the old Hawaiian wedding trip is going to materialize after two years picket firing."

"Perhaps, Mac, it is," said Benjamin, smiling across at me.

"Use your own judgment, Mac; I'll be back in four weeks, and should business matters get too strong for you, address me in care of Henry Wells, 1001 Pine Street, San Francisco."

"Pine Street, Strawberry Valley?" Mac asked, looking up at me from over his eye glasses.

"No sir, San Francisco, California," Benjamin replied with great emphasis.

The months' trip to the Hawaiian Islands, as had long been planned, was cut short by the fear that

our cave might be discovered; so after a short sea trip along the Californian coast we were back at the Hotel Del Strawberry. Benjamin registered in a bold hand two names, using the Mr. and Mrs., and as to whether or not I did I will leave you to discover for yourself should you ever pay the grand hotel a visit.

With us we had brought from San Francisco several mining engineers, to aid in further developing our underground property.

Our secrets were still hidden the day we left the Del Strawberry Hotel to scale Tauquitz Peak, and go down its eastern slope to the mouth of the mysterious cave.

The diamonds Porta and Gertrude gathered from the cave are being worn by scientists who know the world, both soil and air; still these same scientists examining their diamonds, little think of their being the product of mysterious Tauquitz Peak, in southern California.

Still we are delving among a people long since dead.

THE END.

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